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**PATHS TO UTOPIA: ANARCHIST COUNTER-
CULTURES IN LATE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN
BRITAIN 1880-1914.**

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I confirm that the text of this thesis is all my own work

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Summary.

Most historiography on British Anarchism has concluded that the Anarchists contributed very little to the political, social and cultural life of Britain. This thesis aims to provide an alternative view. The failure of Anarchism as a coherent political movement has been adequately charted by others. The purpose of the present work is to investigate the impact of Anarchist ideas and practices within the wider political culture. It will demonstrate that Anarchism had significant things to say about many of the issues troubling British society at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The Anarchist contribution often demonstrated a high degree of originality and coherence and therefore deserves to be taken seriously.

The first chapter outlines the evolution of British Anarchism from the 1880's onwards in order to construct a chronological and organisational context for the thematic debates that follow. It provides an historical account of the various Anarchist groups in Britain and their relations with the rest of the Socialist movement. Chapter Two builds on this by discussing the various social and cultural milieux characteristic of British Anarchism. The following chapters present evidence of the Anarchist contribution to a variety of diverse developments in British society between the 1880's and 1914. In order, these are educational practices, communal ways of living, trade unionism, Syndicalism and finally the status of women in society. The conclusion maintains that, although Anarchist influence was weakened by sectarianism and organisational failures, the Anarchists nevertheless made an original contribution to the political culture, both as theorists and practical activists.

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Abbreviations.

ACF - Amalgamation Committees Federation.

ASE - Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

AST - Amalgamated Society of Tailors.

BAIU - British Advocates of Industrial Unionism

CGT - Confédération Générale du Travail.

GFTU - General Federation of Trade Unions.

GNCTU - Grand National Consolidated Union.

IDL - Industrial Democracy League.

IL - Industrial League.

ILP - Independent Labour Party.

ISEL - Industrial Syndicalist Education League.

IUDA - Industrial Union of Direct Actionists.

IWW - Industrial Workers of the World.

LEL - Labour Emancipation League.

MFGB - Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

NAUSAWC - National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks.

NCAATHCE - Northern Counties Amalgamated Association of Tramway, Hackney and Carriage Employees

NUBSO - National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

NUSAWC - National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks.

OBS - Operative Bricklayers Society.

OSS - Operative Stonemasons Society.

SDF- Social Democratic Federation.

SL - Socialist League.

SLP - Socialist Labour Party.

SWMF - South Wales Miners Federation.

TUC - Trade Union Congress.

URC - Unofficial Reform Committee.

WSPU - Women's Social and Political Union.

Preface.

Most historiography on British Anarchism has concluded that the Anarchists contributed very little to the political, social and cultural life of Britain. This failure of Anarchism as a coherent political movement, and the reasons for it, have been adequately charted by historians. Hermia Oliver and John Quail, for example, concluded that British Anarchism 'did not achieve anything', and 'failed to survive beyond periods of great excitement'.¹ Peter Marshall took a similar view, maintaining that 'Anarchism made little inroads into the British labour movement', while Eric Hobsbawm claimed that 'there was no Anarchist movement of significance'.² Such views must be accepted if one remains confined, as the above authors do, within the narrow confines of an Anarchist 'political movement'. Those historians who have taken Anarchism seriously have concentrated mainly on exploring the formal organisational history of the Anarchist movement. However, such an approach, I would argue, is limited. It constrains us within a history that deals solely with 'small sects which never get beyond that role, groups, journals or whatnot which live and die within a decade without ever playing much of a part'.³

A more productive way of uncovering the impact of Anarchism is not to focus on the activities of Anarchist groups as such, but rather on Anarchist forms of thinking and activism. The purpose of the present study therefore is to investigate the impact of Anarchist ideas and practices within the wider political culture. It will demonstrate that Anarchism had significant things to say about many of the issues troubling British society at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The Anarchist contribution often demonstrated a high degree of originality and coherence and therefore

¹ H. Oliver, The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London, (Croom Helm, London, 1983), p. 152 and J. Quail, The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists, (Paladin, London, 1978), p. 308-9.

² P. Marshall, Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism, (Fontanna Press, London, 1993), p. 491. See also E. J. Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, London, 1984), p. 3.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

deserves to be taken seriously. The dominance of Marxism amongst many historians has tended to result in them being dismissive of Anarchism, seeing it as little more than an irrelevant and incoherent mix of utopianism and romanticism.¹ This, I believe, is an unfair assessment that does not recognise its unique contribution.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines the evolution of British Anarchism from the 1880's onwards in order to construct a chronological and organisational context for the thematic debates that follow. It provides an historical account of the various Anarchist groups in Britain and their relations with the rest of the Socialist movement. Chapter Two builds on this by discussing the various social and cultural milieux characteristic of British Anarchism. It also seeks to outline the organisational and cultural weaknesses that were present within British Anarchism, as well as its guiding principles and preferred means of activity. The following chapters present evidence of the Anarchist contribution to a variety of diverse developments in British society between the 1880's and 1914. These areas of Anarchist activity formed counter- cultures around which Anarchists assembled in order to effect change. Although John Quail concluded that the Anarchists 'paid for the gap between their day-to-day activities and their utopian aspirations', he failed to recognise the extent to which these day-to-day activities themselves operated as counter-cultures intended to lead towards the Anarchist utopia.²

The Anarchists, as we shall see, supported all movements which seemed to be heading in a libertarian direction. They sought to dismantle authoritarian structures and develop networks of co-operation. They tried to build alternative institutions and counter-cultures: free schools, which encouraged learning by desire and response to individual needs; factories based on the principles of self-management and workers' control; communes which pooled resources and shared skills; and revolutionised personal and sexual relations. If the Anarchists did not realise their long term aims, they went some way

¹ See for example E. Hobsbawm, Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973).

to creating counter-cultures and transforming the everyday life of many individuals. Anarchists had a whole range of strategies to expand human freedom in the here and now, not only in a mythical future. By analysing the various Anarchist counter-cultures we will be able to see that those Anarchists who are assumed to have been 'monumentally ineffectual', were in fact at the forefront of a variety of campaigns, which challenged the existing social, economic and cultural values of Victorian and Edwardian society.¹

² Quail, Slow Burning Fuse, p. 309.

¹ Hobsbawm, Revolutionaries, p. 83.

Chapter One. The Evolution of British Anarchism.

It was not lost on Victorian Anarchists that Britain's libertarian tradition stretched back to the Diggers of the English Civil War. Libertarian ideas which would later come to be associated with Anarchism were common in Britain a long time before Anarchism was recognised as a distinctive political trend. However, although it is true that individuals such as Gerald Winstanley, Edmund Burke, William Godwin and Shelley were later regarded by the Anarchists as theoretical precursors, there were no direct links between their writings and later nineteenth century Anarchism.¹ In the period between the publication of Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793) and the 1880's, when Anarchism emerged as a distinct phenomenon, there was little sign that an Anarchist sensibility was developing. This was despite the fact that Robert Owen, who acknowledged Godwin as an influence, had an enormous influence on the growing labour movement. The Owenites developed an early form of Syndicalism which advocated the general strike as the means of social revolution. Like Godwin, their ideal society was one of decentralised self-governing communities.² William Benbow also anticipated Syndicalism in his concept of the millennial strike.³ Nevertheless, with the defeat of the Chartists, the labour movement became overwhelmingly reformist and concerned itself with exerting pressure on

¹ See J. Morrison Davidson's, The Wisdom of Winstanley the Digger, (London, 1904). Edmund Burke's work A Vindication of Natural Society (1756) became well-known amongst late 19th century Anarchists who considered it to be 'a classical introduction to the study of Anarchism'. See The Torch, n. 5, (New Series), 31. Oct. 1894. Years later Kropotkin recognised that Godwin was 'the first theoriser of Socialism without government - that is to say of Anarchism'. Godwin 'understood and openly proclaimed the idea that for the triumph of the revolution men must first get rid of their faith in law, authority, order [and] property'. P. Kropotkin, Modern Science and Anarchism, (Freedom Press, London, 1923), pp. 13, 42.

² M. Beer, History of British Socialism, (London, 1940), p. 328. Owenite Socialism was never conceived mainly in terms of state action. It was essentially a form of co-operation, aiming at way of community living that was to come about by the voluntary action of the converted, and not through legislation. It was no surprise that Anarchists of a later era thought that the Owenites were Anarchist pioneers. Max Nettlau included Owen alongside Warren, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin in his list of those who embodied 'the highest demands of solidarity and freedom'. Freedom, V. 26, n. 280, Aug. 1912, p. 60. See also The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 11, Dec. 1912, p. 4.

³ For an analysis of Benbow's 1832 'Grand National Holiday and Congress of the Productive Classes' see I. Prothero, 'William Benbow and the Concept of the General Strike', in Past and Present, n. 63, 1974, p. 133.

parliament rather than manning the barricades.¹ It was during these post-Chartist years that the main Anarchist ideologies were developed, but not by British thinkers.

Fundamental to all forms of Anarchism was the view that authority was the antithesis of freedom. Denying the possibility of ever changing the nature of authority, the Anarchists intended to replace it with a society without coercion. All of their other conceptions, however divergent, stemmed from these general premises. Anarchists of all kinds opposed the legitimacy of external government and of the state and opposed capitalist economic relations. Anarchists called upon the individual to abandon automatic conformity and to rebel against all the evils of the social system. The ultimate goal of Anarchism was to create a free society which would allow humanity to realise its full potential. This would be a de-centralised society without government, a self-regulating society consisting of voluntary associations of free individuals.

With these principles as a common basis, there emerged several forms of Anarchism differentiated largely by the economic principles each wished to establish. The first thinker to use the term 'Anarchism' was Proudhon. To replace the existing state and capital, Proudhon proposed to create a co-operative society, comprising individuals who exchanged the necessities of life on the basis of labour value and obtained free credit through a people's bank. Proudhon believed that the disappearance of interest would reduce profits to a minimum and yet allow individual initiative and a degree of private property. Individuals and small groups would still possess their instruments of labour, and receive the produce thereof. Associations based on *mutualité* (reciprocity) would ensure the exchange took place in the proper fashion by employing a system of labour notes valued according to the average working time it took to make a product.²

¹ N. Kirk, The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England. (Croom Helm, London, 1985).

² For a discussion of Proudhon's ideas see, S. Edwards. (ed). Selected writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. (Macmillan, London, 1969).

During the 1860's, largely under the inspiration of Michael Bakunin, collectivist Anarchism began to replace mutualism as the dominant strand of thinking. Collectivists believed that the economy should be organised on the basis of common ownership and control by associations of producers. They wished to restrict private property only to the product of individual labour, but argued that there should be common ownership of the land and all other means of production. Collectivists looked towards a free federation of associations of producers and consumers to organise production and distribution. They upheld the principle: 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to work done'.¹

After the demise of the International in the 1870's European Anarchism took on a communist direction, largely through the influence of Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus. Now the criterion for the distribution of collective property was need, rather than work. Anarcho-communists came to believe that the products of labour as well as the instruments of production should be held in common. Since the work of each was entwined with the work of all, they argued that it was virtually impossible to calculate the exact value of any person's labour. Communists therefore concluded that the whole society should manage the economy. Where collectivists saw the workers collective as the basic unit of society, communists looked to the commune composed of the whole population - consumers and producers - as the fundamental association. They adopted as their definition of economic justice the principle: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their

¹ M. Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy, ed.; M. S. Shatz. (Cambridge University Press, 1990). Although the followers of Bakunin exerted a major influence within the International Workingmen's Association, this did not make a difference in terms of spreading the Anarchist idea in Britain. Most of the British members of the International were trade unionists who rallied behind Marx in his battle against Bakunin. The later switch by the surviving British representatives after the Paris Commune of 1871 to back the Anarchists was not because of an ideological affinity, but the outcome of their own fight against what they saw as the increasingly centralist tendencies of the General Council of the International. The Anarchists' federalist stance and their insistence on branch autonomy formed the basis of this new alliance. See H. Collins, 'The English Branches of the First International', in A. Briggs and J. Saville, (eds.), Essays in Labour History, (Macmillan, London, 1960) and H. Collins and C. Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement, (Macmillan, London, 1965), p. 280.

need'.¹ It was this strand of Anarchism, largely developed by Kropotkin, that was to become the dominant ideological trend within British Anarchist circles. Edward Pease later recalled.

In the eighties the rebels were communist anarchists [which] was at any rate a consistent and sublime doctrine. Its leaders, such as Prince Kropotkin....were men of outstanding ability and unimpeachable character, and the rank and file, mostly refugees from European oppression, had direct relations with similar parties abroad.²

A less influential strand of Anarchism had been developed by Josiah Warren in the USA over a decade before Proudhon consolidated his views. He believed that society should adapt to the needs of the individual and not vice versa: 'it must avoid all combinations....which will not leave every individual at all times at liberty to dispose of his or her person and property, in any manner in which his or her feelings or judgement may dictate'.³ Like Proudhon, he focused on property as the key to human freedom. Each individual had the right to the product of their labour, but no one could be entirely self-sufficient. Existing forms of production made a division of labour inevitable. To overcome this contradiction, Warren proposed an exchange of notes based on labour time, with the additional proviso that the intensity of labour be taken into account in evaluating an individual's work. He wanted to establish an 'equitable commerce' in which all goods were exchanged for their cost of production.

An extreme form of individualist Anarchism was cultivated by Max Stirner. He argued that the ideal individual was an untrammelled solipsist leading a completely uncommitted existence, above any social or moral considerations. Stirner conceived society not as an organic whole but as a collection of separate individuals. Individuals would co-operate when and in the manner most suitable to their purposes, and each would go their

¹ On the development of Anarcho-communism see C. Cahm, Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886, (Cambridge University Press, 1989) and M. Fleming, The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth Century European Anarchism, (Croom Helm, London, 1979).

² E. Pease, History of The Fabian Society, (Fifield, London, 1925), p.66.

³ J. Warren, Practical Details in Equitable Commerce, (New Harmony, Indiana, 1852), p. 12, cited in P. Marshall, Demanding the Impossible, (Fontana, London, 1993), p. 385.

own way as soon as union no longer served them. This was the 'union of egoists' who would form contractual relationships and compete with each other. Individualist Anarchism denied not only the existence of benevolence, but also all abstract entities such as the state, society, humanity and god. It celebrated individuality as the supreme value.¹ Although Marx and Engels took Stirner seriously enough to devote a large part of their German Ideology to the refutation of his ideas, Stirner's thought had little impact on Britain.²

Although the ideas of Warren were probably known to a few readers of Owenite papers by letters from American comrades, only very faint currents of the above developments reached Britain before 1880.³ Conditions were not conducive to the growth of revolutionary politics. Chartism was a distant memory and few Socialists survived. Radicals demanded principally the extension of the franchise and the promotion of republicanism and secularism, causes designed to improve the system and not necessarily to change it.⁴ Given this state of affairs, Anarchism, demanding as it did the complete destruction of the social structure and the construction of a new order, had little prospect of striking a chord.

The 1880's however saw the revival of social conflict which had previously lain dormant. The depression which had started in 1875 and reached its trough in 1879 generated a more militant mood. The depression was increasingly regarded by some radicals not as a passing malaise but as symptomatic of the failure of the capitalist system,

¹ J. P. Clark, Max Stirner's Egoism, (Freedom Press, London, 1976).

² See C. J. Arthur (ed), 'Introduction', K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1970), p. 23.

³ It is true that in the 1850's small traces of Anarchist propaganda can be detected in the Radical press, but these seem to have had little impact. Articles relating to Warren and Proudhon appeared in The Leader in 1851. See The Leader, Mar. 15, 22, Apr. 12, Sept. 6, 13, 22, Oct. 18, 1851. Ambrose Cuddon visited 'Modern Times' in 1858 and wrote articles with Anarchist leanings for The Cosmopolitan Review in 1861 and 1862 and for the Working Man. As chairman of the Working Man's Committee he also headed the deputation which greeted Bakunin on his escape from Siberia and arrival in London in 1862.

⁴ Frank Kitz, who became a Socialist in the aftermath of the Commune when the British section of the International was falling apart, recalled that 'of Socialist literature there was little worth mentioning, except that in the Republican and Freethought propaganda'. Freedom V. 26, n. 274, Feb. 1912, p.10.

which was no longer able to address the economic and social ills of the time. The preoccupations of the radical movement ceased to satisfy those who believed that the whole system was in need of replacement. New ideas won attention from young radicals who sought a profounder analysis of the causes of social misery than that of Bradlaugh or Chamberlain.¹ Many embraced Socialist doctrines, while a small minority opted for the Anarchist model of change.

The Anarchist theories that began to acquire currency in the 1880's were, partly due to the lack of domestic Anarchist literature, those that had been cultivated abroad. This foreign influence was augmented through the actual presence of exiled revolutionaries. Between 1871 and 1914, an international community of émigrés played a crucial role in the propagation of these ideologies in Britain. The choice of Britain as a destination was due to its relative political tolerance. Most foreign Anarchists were fleeing from political repression in their home lands. A number of the refugees remained in Britain permanently, others returned home as soon as it was safe to do so.² The different nationalities congregated in clubs such as the Rose Street Club in Soho, the Autonomie in Windmill Street and the Berner Street club in Whitechapel. The émigré community within these clubs constituted a forum for encounters with domestic activists. In such places foreign Anarchists came into contact with British radicals.³ The ideological ground they shared offered scope for the common pursuit of revolutionary agitation and encouraged social interaction. Alongside those who were fleeing political persecution came many Jews who were attempting to escape religious and economic discrimination. Jewish Anarchism carried its own distinguishing features which followed from the fact that Jews in Britain shared a similar cultural background and came up against adverse conditions. Our

¹ J. Saville, 'The Background to the Revival of Socialism in England', in Society For the Study of Labour History Bulletin, n. 11, 1965, p. 17.

² R. Rocker, The London Years, (Robert Anscombe, London, 1956), p. 69.

³ One of these radicals, Frank Kitz, claimed that Anarchism in England owed its origins to 'the propagandist zeal of foreign workmen, who whenever they came into contact with their English confreres sought to enthuse them with.....a new gospel'. Freedom, V. 26, n. 274, Feb. 1912, p.10

discussion will therefore take into account the development of the Jewish milieu. This discussion of Jewish Anarchism will not however, take centre stage, since it has already been well documented by William Fishman.¹

The year 1881 would appear to be an appropriate date to begin the story of British Anarchism since it was in that year that Anarchist propaganda first excited attention. The events of that year produced the germ of an indigenous group which pioneered plebeian British Anarchism. The development of Anarchism that ensued was halted in its tracks by the start of World War One, more than thirty years later. This period can be divide into four phases. The first from 1881-1886, the second from 1886-1896, the third from 1897-1906 and the fourth from 1906-1914. Although these divisions are somewhat arbitrary they are useful since each era marked a stage in the development of British Anarchism and its relationship with the rest of the Socialist movement.

1881 to 1886.

The event that can be said to mark the beginning of an organised Anarchist propaganda was the involvement of a group of native revolutionaries in the defence of John Most, the German editor of an Anarchist journal, against prosecution by the British government. Three of Most's main supporters, Joseph Lane, Ambrose Barker and Frank Kitz saw in his ideas a reflection of many of their own. The defence group was originally formed at a gathering of the English Revolutionary Society, itself part of the Social Democratic Club in Rose Street, (the German Communist Workers Educational Union). The English Society and the club served as a bridge between the foreign revolutionaries and the local ultra-radicals.² Anyone visiting Rose Street would have encountered the European revolutionary world in miniature; its thought, atmosphere and ethos. Such

¹ See W. J. Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914, (Duckworth, London, 1975).

² In 1880 for example, émigré revolutionaries like Johann Neve and Johann Most were joined by domestic radicals like Charles Murray at a meeting to commemorate the 1848 revolutions and the Paris Commune. S. Shipley, Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London, (Journeyman Press, History Workshop Centre, London, 1983), p. 46.

visitors would have witnessed polemical debates about the aims and means of Socialism and Anarchism.

The arrival of Johann Most, the leader of the ultra-left faction of the German SPD, in December 1878 was to set the Rose Street club on an Anarchist course. Still a member of the SPD, his initial plan was to challenge the party's preoccupation with survival during the era of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist laws. However, the impotence of the Reichstag to implement any of its proposals, together with the SPD's moderation, combined to turn him firmly against parliamentary tactics and to convince him of the desirability of extra-legal direct action. Bakunin's advocacy of revolutionary undertakings fitted perfectly with Most's new position and he was easily won over to collectivist Anarchism.¹

Most edited the Rose Street Club's publications and spoke at rallies, becoming the talk of radical London. The Social Democratic newspaper Freiheit was his main concern. By 1880 it had rejected electoral activity and was publishing Anarchist articles. In his paper Most called for violent revolution and the destruction of the system. On 19th March 1881 he cheered the killing of the Russian Tsar Alexander II.² The British police soon arrested him. He stood accused of libelling the Tsar and incitement to murder.³ It was against this background that the English section of the Rose Street Club found itself at the forefront of a campaign promoting an Anarchist cause. They formed a defence committee, issued a manifesto, organised protest meetings and published an English edition of Freiheit.⁴

¹ For an account of Most's life and his war with the SPD leadership see F. Trautmann, The Voice Of Terror: A Biography of Johann Most, (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1980).

² Freiheit (English Edition), V.1, n. 1. 24. April. 1881.

³ For an account of the case see B. Porter, 'The Freiheit Prosecutions 1881-1882', in The Historical Journal, 23, 4, 1980, pp. 833-856.

⁴ On April 20th 1881 the committee organised a meeting on Mile End Waste to protest against Most's imprisonment. Kitz, Dunn and Barker were among those who addressed the crowd. Over a thousand people were said to have been present. Freiheit (English Edition), V.1, n. 1. 24. April. 1881, p. 4. The manifesto declared 'In defending Herr Most, we defend the right of asylum, and being moreover morally certain that this arbitrary seizure and arrest, have been undertaken at the instigation of a foreign power, we appeal to all friends of freedom, to assist us in resisting this

A further opportunity for the dissemination of Anarchist principles in Britain came in July 1881 with the visit of British radicals to the international Anarchist conference in London. The shortage of Anarchist literature in the English language was compensated for by the direct exposure to Anarchism's most impressive exponents.¹ Here activists like Kitz and Lane met Kropotkin, Merlino, Peukert, Malatesta and Louise Michel. In this environment some English radicals became Anarchists.² Although the Congress passed all but unnoticed in London, with public attention preoccupied with the Tichborne Case, it was important in linking foreign exiles with native radicals.

At the start of the 1880's revolutionary ideas were no longer confined to the foreign milieu, but were gaining an increasing number of British supporters. This development manifested itself in the mushrooming of artisan clubs devoted to the Socialist ideal in places like Soho and Clerkenwell. Some of these groups were influenced by what was, at base, a more militant Radicalism, though with an emphasis on physical force. It was to libertarians of this shade of opinion that the imported Anarchism of foreign refugees was to appeal, not in a vacuum but to an already developed set of ideas and to a body of self-confident and active men. As we have seen, foreign Anarchist exiles living in Britain had already found areas of mutual understanding with British radicals. These foundations were built on from 1881 onwards.

In June 1881 Joseph Lane and James Blackwell were among those who helped form the Democratic Federation (after 1884 known as the Social Democratic Federation).³

attempt to Russianize English institutions'. Freiheit Defence Committee, (London, 1881), List 311, Max Nettlau Collection, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

¹ Le Révolté, 14. May. 1881.

² Lane was present as a representative of the Homerton Social Democratic Club and Kitz and Edwin Dunn as representatives of the Rose Street Club. Miss M. P. Le Compte, of the Boston Anarchist delegation reported that the Homerton Club 'had proved its spirit at the International congress'. J. Lane to A. Barker, 12. April. 1912, List 333, Joseph Lane Collection, IISH and M. Le Compte to J. Lane, 12. Aug. 1881, Burns Papers, Add. MS 46345, Vol. LXV, Brit. Lib. Manuscript Room.

³ For an account of the early years of the SDF see M. Bevir, 'The British Social Democratic Federation 1880-1885: from O'Brienism to Marxism', International Review of Social History, V. 37, n. 2, 1992, pp. 207-229.

Despite his role in the formation of this organisation, Lane seems to have preferred his own independent agitation amongst the workers of the East End, forming with James Harrigan the Homerton Social Democratic Club.¹ Soon after Lane joined Ambrose Barker in establishing the Labour Emancipation League (LEL) in 1882. Its object was 'to permeate the mass of the people with a spirit of revolt against their oppressors'.² The agitation of these early pioneers took many forms. They held meetings, lectures and demonstrations, often alongside Anarchists like Kropotkin and Marie le Compte.³ They also distributed simply-worded leaflets which called for violent revolt. They had titles like 'Fight or Starve' and 'The Revenge'.⁴ Under the impact of the No Rent Campaign in Ireland, Lane, Kitz, Harrigan and others declared an anti-landlord campaign. 'Tenants and lodgers' were 'advised to cease all payments of rent and rates until such time as the landlords carry out to their full extent the provisions of the Sanitary and Building Acts'.⁵ In this connection, an adhoc body, the Local Rights Association for Rental and Sanitary Reform, was established. True to their principles, Kitz and his comrades demonstrated the steps to be taken by refusing to pay rent to the landlords of the halls where they met.⁶

The revolutionary Socialism that these early pioneers preached was steeped in Anarchist notions, if sometimes also in ideas incompatible with them, like the demand for adult suffrage which formed part of the LEL's programme. Renunciation of parliamentary action and government in general were simultaneously pronounced. Their mode of action, too, was typical of Anarchist agitation: propaganda was conducted through autonomous grass roots bodies without formal leaders. According to Lane, the LEL was indeed called Anarchist because of its beliefs and manner of action.⁷ Lane himself was one of the

¹ MSS by J. Lane about his life (1911). List 333, Lane Collection, IISH p. 3

² Labour Emancipation League Manifesto, (London, 1881). List 315, NC, IISH.

³ See Handbill for lectures, October 1881, and May-June 1882. List 315, NC, IISH.

⁴ Freedom, V. 26, n. 276, April, 1912, p. 26

⁵ No Rent Manifesto, (LEL, London, 1881), List 315, NC, IISH.

⁶ A. Barker, 'Reminiscences of a Revolutionist', MSS, c. 1947. W/96/Barker/2, Vestry House Museum, Walthamstow, p. 13.

⁷ MSS by J. Lane about his life (1911). List 333, Lane Collection, IISH p. 5.

signatories to the Manifesto to the Working Men of the World, an unsuccessful appeal for the re-establishment of the First International which was issued by the LEL, Homerton Socialist Club and the Rose Street Club in July 1883. The manifesto asserted that 'Governments, no matter of what party, are but the instruments of ruling classes and.....use their strength to support the monopolies and privileges of the exploiters'.¹

Admittedly, at this early stage of British Socialism, all revolutionaries aired similar views and operated in similar fashion, but the outlook of some of them was clearly beginning to take a consistent Anarchist form. The LEL, guided by Lane and Barker, used its weight to drive the SDF, to which it had affiliated in 1884, towards anti-parliamentarism - a necessary component of an Anarchist standpoint.² When the SDF finally split in December 1884 over the parliamentary issue, the LEL went along with, and in fact had a hand in orchestrating, the breakaway faction, the Socialist League (SL). When the League was formed, Kitz's group 'joined at once' since 'its purely propagandist and non-parliamentary objects....appealed to our members'.³ Based in poverty-stricken areas, these early prophets were in a position to transmit to the destitute what they had heard from foreign Anarchists or formulated themselves. Thus, while rarely possessing the greatest literary talents, they were responsible for the verbal communication of Anarchist ideas.

During the same period, Anarchism began to enjoy something of a vogue in middle-class circles. Events involving Anarchists which captured newspaper headlines created this interest. In this latter connection, the Lyons trial of January 1883 in France

¹ Manifesto to the Working Men of the World, (Social Democratic Association, London, 1883). List 315, NC, IISH.

² Lane recalled that he 'forced them to adopt our LEL programme, instead of their mere political one'. J. Lane to A. Barker, 7. March. 1912, List 315, NC, IISH.

³ Freedom, V. 26, n. 273, Jan. 1912, p. 2. For an account of the split within the SDF and the role played by the Anarchists see E. P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, (Merlino, London, 1977), pp. 331-366 and Quail, Burning Fuse, pp. 23-646. Although both of these accounts provide a detailed analysis of Anarchism within the SDF and the SL during this period, by taking an organisational approach to the subject they do not come to any real conclusions as to the true influence of Anarchism on British society.

was particularly important. Sympathy for the Anarchists charged with membership of an international Anarchist organisation was natural to circles where commitment to revolutionary ideas was already strong.¹ The fact that Kropotkin, an eminent scientist and geographer, was one of the accused, no doubt explains why many prominent personalities jumped to his defence. Charlotte Wilson, the wife of a stockbroker, was one of those who established contact with Kropotkin while he served his sentence in France. She was soon won over to Anarchism and organised lectures and a discussion group where the study of Anarchist ideas gained prominence.²

Wilson was also an early member of the Fabian Society and attempted to steer it in an Anarchist direction. When she joined in 1884, the society was studying all available means for social reconstruction and the topics of early meetings included Marxism, Anarchism and Nihilism.³ Indeed, the more one learns of the politics of the Socialist groups at this time, the more it becomes clear that left-wing political traditions were permeable, with sympathisers drifting through them, moving from cause to cause in a pragmatic way. Ideas and rhetoric were shared in common. It was not inconsistent to be a Fabian, as Wilson demonstrated, and a revolutionary Anarchist, when all looked to a moral transformation of the human personality as the key to a future society of free individuals.⁴ As a result Wilson was able to publish her thoughts on Anarchism through the Fabian Society.⁵ In this era of mutual tolerance other papers, including Justice the organ of the

¹ Indeed, a group of revolutionaries including Kitz and Lane, had already published a manifesto dealing with the trial and opened subscriptions for their families. Manifesto of the Socialists and Anarchists tried in Lyons by the French Government in January 1883, (London, 1883), List 315, NC, IISH.

² Sidney Webb, Edward Pease, J. Hunter Watts, Dr Burns-Gibson, Henri Bourdin and Auguste Bordes were members. C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 22. Oct. 1884, List 900. Pearson Papers, University College Library Manuscript Room.

³ C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 8. Aug. 1885, List 900, PP, UCL, MSS. As Bernard Shaw put it in his history of the society, they 'were just as Anarchist as the Socialist League and just as insurrectionary as the Federation' (the SDF). G. B Shaw, The Fabian Society: Its early History. (Fabian Society, Tract 41, 1892), p. 4.

⁴ For a discussion of this 'ethical' Socialist movement see S. Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896', History Workshop Journal, n. 4, Autumn 1977.

⁵ See C. Wilson, 'Anarchism', in What Socialism is, (Fabian Society Tract n. 4, 1886), pp. 9-12 and Practical Socialist, Jan. 1886.

SDF, carried her articles expounding the Anarcho-communist position.¹ Wilson's activity no doubt increased interest in Anarchism in radical circles.

The same can be said for Henry Seymour, a keen explorer of radical thought who came across Anarchist ideas in his studies and found in them an echo of his own aspirations. In 1885 he moved to London and started his paper, The Anarchist. Seymour's paper stimulated a measure of interest in various radical circles both in Britain and abroad. In May it was reported that an Anarchist group was meeting at the paper's office to discuss social questions. Among the early supporters were Bernard Shaw, Edward Pease, Henry Glasse, James Harrigan, Lothrop Withington and Elisée Reclus. Seymour was also in contact with Anarchists in Europe and the USA and his journal accordingly served as a focal point for those interested in Anarchism. The position of the paper was distinctly individualist Anarchist, a synthesis of Proudhon's mutualism and the ideas of Warren. The first issue announced that the paper would advocate the abolition of the state and proclaim the sovereignty of the individual, including the right of private judgement in morals. The paper attacked monopoly, privilege and authority - the elements that prevented the development towards individual sovereignty and 'self-governed social organisation' and in particular reviled the state monopoly of 'the medium of exchange'. The paper argued that the economic system most appropriate to a free and equal society would be grounded in free access to all the means of production, free choice of currency and free competition.²

Quite independently from Anarchist advance in British middle-class circles, Anarchism began to gain converts among the Jews of London's East End, having been

¹ Justice, 8, 22, 29. Nov. and 6. Dec. 1884. Anarchism stood as an insistent ideology against which the various Socialist trends took shape in the 1880's. This was the role Anarchism played in Socialist societies, each of which, was initially divided by ideological conflict. This is evident in the growth of Anarchist ideas within the SDF and the split between the libertarian wing and the authoritarian wing, and in the role Anarchism played in the Fabian Society. Anarchism in the SDF and the Fabian society helped the process of ideological clarification, but as soon as scattered insights cohered into some sort of exclusive position, Anarchism had no further function as was discarded. Despite a brief flirtation with Anarchism, the main body of labour thinking rebuffed the vestiges of the uncompromising approach to change and turned decisively to the achievement of goals through reform by legislation.

² The Anarchist, March. 1885.

brought over from Eastern Europe by Jews fleeing persecution.¹ Signs of Anarchism had already surfaced in the East End in 1876 when the Hebrew Socialist Union was organised by Aaron Lieberman. The union was not officially an Anarchist body, but a libertarian spirit pervaded it right from the start. The meetings were conducted with little regulation or procedural rigidity, and its mentor Lieberman - believing Anarchism to be in the Jewish social tradition - spoke about it as their chief objective.² Lieberman's impact was lasting. He left behind a group of disciples with the nucleus of a libertarian organisation and a desire to organise the Jewish workers into trade unions. As in indigenous Socialist circles, firm boundaries between Anarchism and other Socialist strands were not yet clear in the Jewish milieu. Different viewpoints coexisted in the same revolutionary circles and coalesced around two enterprises, the International Working Men's Club which was founded in Berner Street in 1884, and the Yiddish journal the Arbeter Frait (The Worker's Friend) founded in 1885 by disciples of Lieberman. Although not exclusively under Anarchist control, both the paper and the club were channels for communicating Anarchism to the Jewish public. This Anarchist influence was to increase in the years that followed.

1886 to 1896.

Anarchism thus steadily penetrated the political map of the left and became a topical subject. Much of the interest was however eclectic and non-committed, and partisan opinion was sporadic, at best existing in organisations which also included hostile points of view, like the Arbeter Frait Group, the SDF and the SL. The Anarchist nucleus of the latter was influential in the League's General Council, and through its branches was gradually acquiring a foothold in the provinces as well. But the Anarchist influence in the League was not yet decisive. Against this background, the year 1886 registered a turning

¹ W. J Fishman, 'Jewish Immigrant Anarchists in East London 1870-1914.', in The Jewish East End 1840-1939, (The Jewish Historical Society, London, 1981), p. 234-235.

² Fishman, East End Radicals, pp. 113-5.

point in the history of British Anarchism. It was then that the organisational vacuum was filled by a coterie of middle-class intellectuals who called themselves the Freedom Group.

The group was to leave its stamp on the course of British Anarchism in many respects. While other groups and papers would come and go, this London based group and its paper Freedom were to survive all set-backs. True, by accommodating the more literate and moderate elements, it became a sort of elitist, semi-closed club frequently criticised by other Anarchists. Yet for all the accusations levelled against it, the group by and large functioned as a cohesive factor, both from an organisational point of view and on the psychological level: in every phase of Anarchist activity and under all circumstances, the group and paper were there to remind activists that Anarchism still had the breath of life. The evolution of the group from a barely known society in which Anarchism was discussed by sympathisers and non-sympathisers alike, into an enduring local agency of propaganda would perhaps not have been possible but for the arrival of Kropotkin in Britain in 1886 and his immediate involvement in the group's activity. His association with the group ensured its prominent position ideologically and organisationally. Kropotkin formulated the philosophy of the group - Anarchist communism - and set the style and tone that were to persist in it for many years.¹

It was Charlotte Wilson, the leading spirit of the Freedom group, who had secured Kropotkin's promise even before his release from prison to assist in producing an Anarchist paper.² When Kropotkin arrived in Britain, Seymour invited them to use The

¹ It would have been of much more consequence for Anarchism, in Max Nettlau's opinion, if Kropotkin had linked his destiny to the dynamic SL. He recalled: 'The League at that time contained the flower of English revolutionary socialism, mainly the popular revolutionists with strong Anarchist leanings,....and some very good people who felt attracted by Morris's thorough going socialism. If Kropotkin had joined them at that time he would have had the most friendly reception and the fullest opportunities for Anarchist propaganda; many comrades who were then at their best could have been won'. Nettlau believed that Kropotkin's refusal to work with the SL was because of Hyndman's misrepresentation to him of the internal situation of the Socialist forces in Britain and Kropotkin's own overestimation of the Marxist influence on the SL. Freedom, V. 35, n. 380, Feb. 1921, p. 12.

² Kropotkin came to Britain only reluctantly, there being no plausible alternative. By the time he left prison it was clear that the European countries in which he might have felt at ease, principally Russia and France, were barred to him. He still recalled with distaste the loneliness he

Anarchist as its platform. The offer was accepted. It was decided that the paper would be issued under the joint editorship of Kropotkin, Wilson, Seymour, Saverio Merlino, Sergei Stepniak and Nikolai Chaikovsky. Seymour was willing to make great compromises and put his own individualist tendencies on hold. In March 1886 the paper advocated straightforward Anarcho-communism. In true communist fashion Seymour declared that future articles would be unsigned.¹ The joint editorship did not last long. It soon became clear that the ideological differences were irreconcilable. In the June issue all the original individualist features of The Anarchist were restored and Seymour recovered his position as sole editor.

The Freedom group now turned to producing a mouthpiece of pure communism. The first issue of Freedom appeared in October 1886 and set forth its ideal of freedom 'one with social feeling; of free scope for the social impulses, now distorted by property, and its guardian the law; of free scope for that individual sense of responsibility, of respect for self and for others'.² Freedom was addressed first of all to Socialists, who should be made to understand Anarchism. Consequently Freedom was, apart from being a medium for Kropotkin's ideas, also a platform for the discussion of Socialist ideas in general. As part of this process Kropotkin set out on a lecture tour to spread interest in Anarchism during the autumn. In the course of his tour he triumphantly observed that many workers shared the Anarchist belief in voluntarism and the impossibility of the state administration of social life.³

and his wife suffered when they lived in England for a year in 1881, as well as his own previous hopelessness about the advancement of Socialism in England. Despite this, for many years he wrote articles for British Anarchist papers and gave many lectures. He earned his living by journalism, especially for the scientific press and as a scholar enjoyed a great reputation. P. Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist, (Dover Publications, New York, 1971), p. 488.

¹ The Anarchist, 20. April. 1886. For a detailed account of the group's development see Oliver, International Anarchist, pp. 33-38, 42-50, 127-29 and Quail, Burning Fuse, pp. 47-62. Although both of these studies are very valuable in terms of outlining the history of Seymour's group and the later Freedom group they do not really tell us how influential Anarchism and Anarchist ways of thinking were. The following chapters will seek to remedy this.

² Freedom, V. 1, n. 1, Oct. 1886, p. 1.

³ Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist, pp. 493-4.

The encouraging note on which Freedom was welcomed in radical circles must have provided additional reason for optimism. Although the main burden of producing the paper fell on the shoulders of Wilson, who acted as editor, and Kropotkin, who contributed an article to each issue, Freedom was helped from the outset by Anarchists and non-Anarchists alike. William Morris offered the use of the offices of his journal The Commonweal, and the Freethought Publishing Company, which belonged to Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, offered its facilities. Yet as a small cadre the groups' impact was limited. It could sow only sporadic seeds. However, a major breakthrough came a year after Freedom appeared. The catalyst which turned the isolated activities of the Freedom group and other Anarchists into a wider tendency was a sequence of events in America. The decisive factor was the inspiring example of the Chicago Anarchists, whose brutal judicial murder both shocked and inspired activists of every opinion.¹ At a meeting at South Place Institute in London on 14th October 1887, organised by the Freedom group, Charlotte Wilson gave a step by step explanation of the events leading up to their trial. Amid great cheering, she said that the men were not to be hanged for any crime but that of having been 'prominent advocates of the cause of the toilers'.² The heroic bearing of the Chicago victims inclined many Socialists to listen with respect to the Anarchist case.

From the time of the execution of the Chicago Anarchists, British Anarchism took on a more determined character. Whereas previously the Anarchists had often been forced to join the outdoor propaganda efforts of other groups, now, being the focus of an international drama, they were in a better position to initiate their own meetings. In addition, the case was a coalescing experience for the Anarchists scattered around the

¹ The seven Chicago Anarchists were condemned to death (two of the sentences later being commuted to life) after demonstrations in October 1886 in favour of an eight hour day, during which a bomb was thrown into the Haymarket which killed seven policemen. Police had fired on the crowd the day before. No attempt was made to prove that any of the Anarchists rounded up had actually thrown the device, they were prosecuted mainly for their revolutionary beliefs. Four of them were hanged on 11th November 1887. The dignity and conviction of the condemned men in the face of a frenzied hate campaign compelled attention. For months the shameful proceedings of a brutal and perjured 'justice' had dragged themselves out before British radicals.

² Freedom, V. 2, n. 13. Nov. 1887, p. 8.

country; the bond between them was henceforth to assume a more concrete form. Although most Socialist groups commemorated the anniversary for a few years, it was the Anarchists who fervently and persistently fastened on to it as a token of Anarchist solidarity.¹

The Freedom Group now steadily absorbed new converts. In February 1888 it started monthly discussion groups in the SL hall in Farringdon Street, London, where members of the group preached Anarchism to large crowds. In November the Freedom group organised a lecture tour by Lucy Parsons, the widow of one of the Chicago martyrs. The tour also provided an occasion for a conference in London, attended by several new Anarcho-communist groups which had sprung into existence. In August 1889, Freedom announced that the 'rapid growth of conscious Anarchist opinion makes it a matter of interest to a large number of comrades to know where and when meetings are to be held', and in the same issue a regular propaganda column was started which was to provide detailed information. In September it was reported that the Freedom Group had made arrangements for open-air meetings to be held in Victoria Park, London, every Sunday afternoon. Anarchist speakers also lectured in the clubs of other political groups. By December 1889, Anarchist lectures and meetings filled two large columns in Freedom. These activities took place in London, Brighton, Huddersfield, Aberdeen, Manchester and Yarmouth. Arising from this expansion and from the labour unrest in the country, a need was felt for more Anarchist literature in English. The East London Anarchist communist group partly fulfilled this need by publishing and distributing a new paper, The Anarchist Labour Leaf between July and October 1890.²

¹ Ibid., V. 5, n. 61, Dec. 1891, p. 88.

² During 1888 Freedom was obliged to change its address several times. In February it had to move from the office of the Freethought Publishing Company to the office of The Socialist, run by Thomas Bolas. From July, when Bolas's paper was wound up, Freedom was printed and published by Thomas Binning at the Labour Union Printery. Apart from a brief interruption in January and February 1889, during which Wilson [through illness] had to leave London temporarily to be replaced until her return by James Blackwell, Freedom continued to thrive. In the summer of 1889 Freedom's members bought their own type and added a single sheet supplement to the paper. In January 1891, Freedom moved to the New Fellowship Press in Newington Green where it had its own office under the management of William Wess. A month later, Blackwell resigned and Wilson, who by then had returned, continued as editor.

Meanwhile, impelled by the same factors which had boosted Anarchist activity in the country as a whole, a distinct Anarchist position was crystallising within the anti-parliamentarian camp of the SL. Although the SL was founded primarily as an anti-parliamentary propaganda group it had soon split into rival parties divided on the question of political participation.¹ During the debates that ensued on this question the Anarchist wing won over more sympathisers and increasingly set the tone and the moves of the faction of which it formed a part. The Anarchists bore a large measure of responsibility for the steadfast and uncompromising battle against the parliamentarian elements, a battle which was won with their final withdrawal in the summer of 1888.² With the League effectively under exclusive anti-parliamentarian control, the Anarchists could manoeuvre its policies in their direction with fewer obstacles.

Jewish Anarchism was also undergoing a period of consolidation. This process was marked by a sharpening of the ideological division between Anarchism and Social Democracy, culminating in an organisational separation. In the meantime, the two tendencies jointly promoted Socialism. During the 1880's they co-operated in running the Berner Street club, producing the Arbeter Fraint and organising industrial protest. From June 1886 the club also housed the Arbeter Fraint, which in July 1886 became a weekly. Under the editorship of Philip Kranz, a Social Democrat, a policy of non-partisanship was announced. His associate was an Anarchist known as Jaffe.³ The Arbeter Fraint was read by Jewish workers in London, Leeds and Liverpool, helping precipitate the formation of

¹ Lane later recalled 'we had just the same divisions (as in the SDF) again in the SL, politics and anti-politics because the Avelings, Bax and a lot of others only left the SDF because Morris did and out of hatred of Hyndman and not from any principles'. MSS by J. Lane about his life (1911), List 333, L. C. IISH p. 7-8.

² Thompson, William Morris, p. 509. According to Fred Charles almost all the branches of the SL were anti-parliamentary, if not Anarchist, on the eve of the split, and wanted to keep to the SL's original manifesto. Only Croydon and Bloomsbury had a majority in favour of political action. Charles maintained that he and the other Anarchists never had 'definite plans to alter the league or make it more Anarchist, but were agitating....to keep it to its original [anti-parliamentary] manifesto'. MSS notes taken by Tom Keell at Whiteway Colony after conversations with Fred Charles. (1930). pp. 1-2, NC, IISH.

³ A. Frumkin, The Springtime of Jewish Socialism, (New York, 1940), p. 36.

Jewish Socialist groups. Despite the attempts of the Jewish establishment to undermine these activities, more and more people joined the club and read the paper. At the turn of the decade, members of the Arbeter Frait group played an important role in initiating Jewish labour agitation in London, providing guidance and leadership in strikes. Their biggest success at the time was the tailors' strike in 1889.¹ By the end of the decade however, the paper was going through a major ideological shift, slowly moving towards Anarchism. As the arguments between the various groups in the Socialist movement intensified, the Arbeter Frait gradually lost its neutrality, showing a bias towards Anarcho-communism. The Anarchists and Social Democratic streams drew further and further apart, the Anarchists becoming the ever more dominant partner within the group and the club. In 1889 Jaffe joined the drift of Jewish youth to America, leaving Anarchism unrepresented on the Arbeter Frait's editorial board. To remedy this situation, the Anarchists invited Saul Yanovsky to come over from America and take his place. The arrival of Yanovsky signalled the end of the policy of non-partisanship.² That the Anarchists might take full control was signalled when in February 1891 Yanovsky was entrusted with the editorship. Their hegemony was confirmed two months later when the Social Democrats were outvoted 23 to 21 at a decisive meeting which determined the control over the paper.³

At the same time that these events were unfolding, the individualists were propagating their version of Anarchism. Non-invasive relationships between free individuals were accepted by individualist Anarchists as the condition and limitation of liberty. Most of them added that equality was just as much a condition, though it should not be imposed.⁴ However, they explained that their equality was not the same as that of the communists. For the individualists equality meant equal rights and the abolition of

¹ Fishman, East End Radicals, p. 182. For more details of these developments see Chapter Six.

² Rocker, The London Years, p. 128.

³ Fishman, East End Radicals, p. 200.

⁴ H. Seymour, The Philosophy of Anarchism, (London, 1888), p. 2. See also John Baddock, Slaves to Duty, (London, 1894), pp. 12-13.

monopolies.¹ In a society rid of monopolies, it was assumed, liberty would also bear the sense of ‘securing to the labourer the product he has produced’.² They further argued that through the operation of a totally free and unregulated economy profits would disappear and private possession would no longer be the capitalist accumulation of other people’s labour; in fact, it would not be property at all but the expression of individual freedom.³ The Anarcho-communists, they argued, preordained equality for future society and therefore neglected the voluntarist libertarian principle. Communist equality was also rejected on the grounds that the needs of all, idle and weak, would be satisfied, which for the individualist meant not only robbing ‘labour of its rights’, but also propping up exploitation by those who lived at the expense of the more productive elements in society.⁴

In addition to facilitating an extensive publication of literature, individualists like Seymour also spoke at meetings alongside Anarcho-communists. Yet the ill-feeling that developed between Seymour and Wilson in the pioneering days of collaboration, and his attacks on communism were not conducive to a good relationship with the Freedom group.⁵ In the latter part of 1886 he also fell out with the SL over his staunch support of Theodore Reuss against the League’s official accusation that he was a police spy (an accusation that turned out to be true).⁶ Perhaps partly as a result of these strained relationships, Seymour encountered continuous difficulties in producing The Anarchist.⁷ In April 1888, he suspended publication for three months, and in August was forced to stop publication altogether. He did not give up however. In the last issue he had promised to

¹ H. Seymour, Anarchy: Theory and Practice (London, 1888), p. 5.

² Seymour, The Philosophy of Anarchism, p. 3.

³ The Anarchist, 22. Jan. 1886.

⁴ Ibid., May. 1887.

⁵ The Anarchist, May. 1887.

⁶ Seymour opened up the columns of The Anarchist to Reuss’s supporters in the Autonomie group in their dispute with the SL council. On one occasion he devoted the best part of an entire issue of the paper to refute the allegations against Reuss, adding for good measure that Victor Dave (a member of the general council) was the real spy. See The Anarchist, n. 20, Oct. 1886.

⁷ Ibid., March. 1887.

return to the scene and in January 1889 he started a new journal, the Revolutionary Review.¹

Despite the title of the new paper, a tendency away from militancy and towards a less abrasive form of Anarchism was discernible.² Seymour's revolutionary preoccupations also subsided. No longer did he report exclusively on the condition of the labour and revolutionary movements as previously. His new mood better suited the approach of the growing number of people who began to express interest in individualist Anarchism, and in time would actually be more typical of the individualist Anarchism that was to consolidate in Britain. Indeed, whereas Seymour's early collaborators were firebrands like James Harrigan, the new recruits were conspicuous for their lack of revolutionary ardour.³

Around the close of the decade some of these new adherents nevertheless established working relationships with the communists of a more revolutionary inclination. This coincided with the latter's underlying wish for a greater degree of Anarchist unity. The SL, no doubt reflecting its more revolutionary and working-class basis, showed little interest in the individualists, apart from when it found it necessary to rebuke their ideas.⁴ It was the Freedom group, for which Anarchism was a general name for 'a political theory compatible with diverse economical opinions', which regarded the individualists as members of the same family.⁵ The Freedom group hoped that in time, however, that the mutualists, those individualists who followed Proudhon, rather than the extreme Stirnerites,

¹ Only nine issues appeared and it folded in September. Revolutionary Review, V.1, n. 1, Jan. 1889.

² The Anarchist, June. 1886.

³ Harrigan's speaking style was highly incendiary in nature. At a large meeting at the Crantham Coffee Place in South London to which he lectured on Anarchism in November 1885, Harrigan, in an aside while telling about a no-rent campaign, advised his audience that 'by way of a pastime they should amuse themselves by poisoning off the landlords'. The Anarchist, n. 9, 9. Dec. 1885.

⁴ Only on rare occasions did individualist Anarchists lecture to Socialist League audiences. One such occasion was Albert Tarn's lecture to the North Kensington branch at Clarendon Coffee Place in March 1890 on 'The Abolition of the State'. See Commonweal, V. 6, n. 218, 15. March. 1890.

⁵ Freedom, V. 2, n. 16, Feb. 1888, p. 32.

would come to agree with the communists. In the meantime, Freedom asserted: 'Economic differences.....do not prevent unity....The bond of union between Anarchists is their common belief in individual freedom of self-guidance and voluntary association'.¹ A number of individualists responded favourably to the invitation from the Freedom group to meet at the Autonomie Club on March 30th 1890 in order 'to thrash out the differences among Anarchists'.²

All these developments boosted, and numerically reinforced British Anarchism. The early 1890's were its halcyon days. In addition to the existing SL provincial groups, new groups emerged in London, Leicester, Walsall, Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool and Dundee. The contentment felt in the ranks was expressed in tones of increased self-assurance. The Chicago commemoration meetings of 1890 were viewed as the ultimate proof that 'the seed has sunk into fertile soil and is germinating there'.³ The upsurge of Anarchist activity was characterised by a closing of the ranks among all the Anarchist sections. Conferences and joint meetings of Anarchists of the communist, collectivist and individualist variety became commonplace. Yet co-operation with the individualists was brief. If the new decade signalled the convergence of the communist currents, it simultaneously marked the growing gap between them and the individualists. From the early 1890's, individualists would show themselves less in revolutionary circles. This

¹ Ibid., V. 4, n. 48, Nov. 1890, p. 87. The Stirnerite streak that flowed through much of American individualist Anarchism found little reflection in Britain. John Mackay, a millionaire German poet, had propagated Stirner's philosophy in Britain in the late 1880's when he was researching his novel The Anarchists (1891) and some individualist Anarchists like Badcock and Tarn did evince an egoist bias within the framework of their mutualist economics, much of which they acquired through Tucker who was himself inspired by Stirner's ideas. The philosophy of Stirner was discovered in a more direct way as the impact of Nietzsche began to be felt towards the end of the century. Around this time The Truthseeker edited by the freethinker John William Gott and published in Bradford also manifested some of this influence among all shades of Anarchist opinion. During the same period, the American individualist John Basil Barnhill published The Eagle and the Serpent in London. This work specifically promoted the views of Stirner, Nietzsche and Ibsen.

² Freedom, V. 4, n. 39 Feb. 1890, p. 8.

³ Ibid., V. 4, n. 49, Dec. 1890, p. 95.

disposition by the individualists to draw away from the communists was a barometer of the changing tone within the communist camp.

The general discontent among the labour force at the turn of the decade disposed many Socialists to believe that the revolution was dawning. With this conviction, the Anarchists of the SL stepped up their agitation, stressing the need for more immediate, forceful and direct action that would radicalise the masses. The mood encapsulated in this shift conveyed the growing impatience within the League with the tactics of peaceful education as advocated by Morris and his followers, who were now the only non-Anarchists in the League. The disagreements with the Anarchists came to a head when the Anarchist group secured a majority on the SL council. In October 1889 Morris was removed from the editorship of The Commonweal, and Frank Kitz took over. The latter was soon joined as co-editor by David Nicoll. A similar process of radicalisation was taking place throughout the provinces, as the Anarchists gradually consolidated their hold on the branches.¹

Under the Anarchists' sole control, The Commonweal threw open its pages to those who favoured violent means. Repelled by such calls for terrorist activity, on 21st November 1890 Morris and the majority of the Hammersmith branch withdrew from the SL.² They reconstituted themselves as the Hammersmith Socialist Society.³ The departure

¹ Although the question of violent propaganda by deed was the final nail straw, as far as Morris and his followers were concerned, prior to this a battle had been taking place within local branches of the SL between out and out Anarchists and anti-parliamentarians who wished to keep the league to its original manifesto. For an account of this process within the Leicester, Glasgow and Sheffield branches of the League see. B. Lancaster, Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906, (Leicester University Press, 1987), pp. 110-112. J. Leatham to J. Bruce Glasier, 18. Nov. 1888, E. Carpenter to J. Bruce Glasier, 2. May. 1890, Glasier Papers. 1.1 1888/13 18-11, Sydney Jones Library, Liverpool, and G. Hukin to E. Carpenter, 15. December. 1890. Carpenter Collection, Sheffield Local History Library.

² The gradual dissolution of the League and the role played by the Anarchists in its demise are discussed in great detail in Thompson, William Morris, pp. 512-79, Quail, Burning Fuse, p. 144-161 and Oliver, International Anarchist, pp. 50-64. The group focused approach that all three accounts take does not really tell us much about the true extent of Anarchist influence.

³ Hammersmith Socialist Society Papers, V. 3, Add. MS 45893, ff. 1-3. British Library Manuscript Room. It was still an anti-parliamentary organisation, which explains why Tochatti, Touzea Parris, Andreas Scheu and other Anarchists opposed to the now violent tone of the SL could join it. Members could, as individuals, engage in the political process, but the society as a whole rejected politics.

of the moderate elements and the subsequent decline in membership weakened the League, yet this was offset by a greater sense of ideological confidence and purpose. This was in turn enhanced by the crowds of thousands drawn by the League's outdoor meetings during 1890 and 1891. In addition, The Commonweal, which had turned into a monthly in December 1890 upon Morris's departure, again managed to appear as a weekly from May 1891.

The League's rent strike campaigns, which attracted audiences of hundreds in the East End, fed the Anarchists' growing optimism. In their enthusiasm some Leaguers were convinced that revolution was around the corner and a few advocated violence, including the use of dynamite, as way of intensifying the potential revolutionary situation. Emotion-charged speeches and heroic postures became more common.¹ In the midst of this euphoria, the League was rudely awakened. On the 8th January 1892 it was reported that several Anarchists in Walsall had been arrested for possessing dynamite and conspiring to cause an explosions.² Three of them were sentenced to ten years. Together with other Anarchist organs, the few issues of The Walsall Anarchist, published by George Cores from 27th February 1892, alleged police complicity in the case. Nicoll, the editor of The Commonweal tried to prove their innocence and the part played in their arrest by a police spy.³ In an article entitled 'Anarchy at the Bar', he named 'Hangman Hawkins', and 'the spy Melvile, who sets his agents to conduct the plots which he discovers' as the men responsible for their imprisonment. He asked 'are these men fit to live' and was arrested for incitement to murder and sentenced to sixteen months.⁴

¹ John Creaghe was one of those known to advocate such methods. See The Commonweal, 28. Nov. 1891.

² For accounts of the case see Quail, Burning Fuse, pp. 103-43 and Oliver, International Anarchist, pp. 77-82.

³ He was also secretary of the Walsall Amnesty Committee and organised many meetings to demand their release. At one of these meetings on 20th February 1893, Keir Hardie, William Morris, Edward Carpenter and J. C. Kenworthy spoke. D. Nicoll to M. Nettlau, 22. Jan. 1893, List 211, NC, IISH.

⁴ The Commonweal, 30. April. 1892, p. 9.

Only after a while were the damaging consequences of aggressive language fully brought home to the League. Immediately after the Walsall affair, the stark reality of dawning isolation was obscured by the sympathy of many Socialists with the Walsall prisoners. The prompt resumption of the publication of The Commonwealth and the popularity it enjoyed for a short time gave more cause for complacency. Yet the aftermath left little room for optimism. The strong suspicions that the Walsall affair was instigated by an agent provocateur poisoned the atmosphere of the League. Growing public hostility, lack of finance and the moving away of a few active members from Anarchist centres, scattered and diminished the League's forces. Although outdoor meetings still attracted large crowds, subscriptions to The Commonwealth dropped off and the paper suspended publication from 4th September 1892 to 1st May 1893.

The public were shocked again when, on 15th February 1894, a bomb exploded in Greenwich Park killing Martial Bourdin, the person holding it. He was suspected of planning to blow up the Observatory.¹ Sympathisers now kept themselves away from any contact with the Anarchists. Most of the League's groups gradually disbanded. Shortage of money became acute with the passing months. In April 1894 Tom Cantwell and Carl Quinn were arrested and a month later sentenced to six months for incitement to murder members of the Royal family.² While they were held in prison, the police broke into the offices of The Commonwealth. This month-long occupation by the police marked the end of its publication. The last number appeared on 12th May 1894.³

Throughout this period Freedom also passed through trying times. By 1892, it had moved its offices three times in two years. Wilson had to resign again for personal reasons

¹ His real intentions have never been identified. See Quail, Slow Burning Fuse, pp. 162-68 and Oliver, International Anarchist, pp. 99-109. Both of these writers, I would argue, over-emphasise the importance of the Greenwich explosion. Oliver in particular spends a lot of time trying to get to the bottom of the affair. While this is indeed interesting, it does not really tell us much about Anarchist influence.

² The Torch, n. 9 (New Series), 18. Feb. 1895, p. 13-14.

³ The paper was single-handedly revived by Nicoll with sporadic issues appearing in Sheffield and then in London in 1896-98 and a few later until 1907.

and the editorship was temporarily taken over by Florence Dryhurst. The paper was also suffering from shortage of funds. Tainted with the Anarchist image, though not employing violent language, the Freedom group's situation became all the more difficult. It badly needed a transfusion of new blood. The merger with the residue of the SL at the start of 1895 was thus highly welcome. The few remaining Leaguers brought with them tenacity, manpower and printing facilities.¹ The League, for its part, was drained of physical and mental resources and no longer had any reason to continue as a separate entity. The integration of the active London forces was thus quick and easy. With the union between the two groups, the flirtation of British Anarchism with violence was over. However brief, it had cost much of the momentum slowly acquired up to the early 1890's.

More importantly, the association between violence and Anarchism made the rest of the Socialist movement far more wary of co-operating with the Anarchists. For example the Manchester Labour Church stopped the local Anarchist group from using its halls for meetings.² In his address on 'The old year and the new' on January 7th 1894 John Burns denied that the Anarchists were part of the labour movement.³ Although the SDF was the most antagonistic, even the more libertarian Independent Labour Party (ILP) Socialists began to distance themselves.⁴ Indeed, it is worth noting here that with the formation of the ILP in 1893 there was an important shift in the preoccupation of British Socialism. Revolutionary Socialists and Anarchists in the 1880's had focused their debates on issues of organisation, the nature of leadership, on how far Socialists should support palliatives, or participate in parliamentary elections and campaign for state intervention. The ILP from the first accepted the need to get Labour candidates into parliament.⁵ In the 1890's its

¹ Some of them, such as John Turner and Joseph Pressburg, had already been active in both organisations and the rest were well acquainted with the members.

² *Commonweal*, V. 2, n. 20 (New Series), 20. Jan. 1893.

³ *Freedom*, V. 8, n. 84, Jan-Feb. 1894, p. 3.

⁴ In November 1895 for example, Agnes Henry was to lecture to the Birmingham ILP on Anarchism, but the lecture was cancelled since the party feared she 'might advocate violence'. A. Henry to A. Hamon, 29. Nov. 1895, List 88, Augustin Hamon Collection, IISH.

⁵ The formation of the ILP 'represented the success of a familiar brand of politics, centred on the pursuit of electoral success through a distinct party, and the defeat of a broader strategy tied

leaders were concerned to present 'reasonable' Socialism and anxious to forget their links with revolutionary politics.¹

The Jewish Anarchists, too, were to suffer from internal difficulties in an increasingly hostile environment as the 1890's progressed. The split following the departure of the Social Democrats immediately resulted in a drop in attendance at the Berner Street Club. On November 25th 1892 the club closed down and the Anarchists were forced to meet in the back room of the Sugar Loaf pub.² Yanovsky was left to issue the Arbeter Fraint with the assistance of two Anarchists whose poor literary ability forced him to write most of the articles himself. Though he managed briefly to increase the sales of the paper, its financial state was so shaky that publication was suspended from January 22nd to April 8th 1892. For the next few years it appeared irregularly. The Jewish Anarchists also watched their ranks split open by contradictory approaches towards the use of violence, and in 1894, as a result suffered the withdrawal of Yanovsky who had stood out against terrorism. Soon after he returned to America. The paper then ceased publication between July 27th 1894 and April 19th 1895.

During the first half of the 1890's the individualists focused their propaganda on economic reform. They believed that the root of poverty lay in the Bank of England's hold

neither to specific organisations nor institutional forms. Emphases upon making Socialists and upon living as Socialists...were subordinated gradually to the harsh dictates of electoral strategy'. See D. Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906, (Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 10.

¹ Yet this was never taken to the same extremes as within the SDF. As Howell notes 'notions of Making Socialists and of Living as Socialists' although increasingly subordinated to electoral imperatives often survived within ILP branches. Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, p. 392. Such ethical sentiments, alongside the 'primitive democracy' of the ILP at grass roots level, especially the Clarion inspired sections, still allowed for inter-action with the Anarchists. Although a group interested in bureaucratic consolidation and cultivating a respectable electoral image did gradually gain a commanding administrative position within the ILP (including Hardie, Snowden, MacDonald and Glasier), they never had things their own way all the time. On many occasions the 'rank and file' at the local level went their own way. For example, the Norwich Anarchists reported in December 1895 that while they were on especially bad terms with the local SDF, they could co-operate with the ILP, whose club they often used. 'The spirit of the ILP' wrote Barker, 'is far different to that of the SDF and we are on quite friendly terms with them, several of their members being entirely with us in our view of the future society'. Freedom, V. 9, n. 99, Dec. 1895, p. 124.

² Rocker, The London Years, pp. 81-2.

on the money supply. Thus, they concentrated on the advocacy of a free currency. By increasing the supply of money in circulation, they hoped to lower the rate of interest and diminish the capitalists' profits.¹ The worker would be on an equal footing with any producer, able to use his ability and energy to the full and bargain in the context of equal conditions and real free competition. The people who now joined Seymour in voicing these views were like him equipped with literary ability and some financial means. As a result these years saw the production of a wealth of individualist Anarchist literature and the initiation of various enterprises instructing the public in the advantages of administering a mutualist economy.²

Concern with individual liberty in private matters was repeatedly expressed by individualist Anarchists. In 1891 for example, Albert Tarn set up the Citizen's Defence League whose object was 'to bring into association all those who are prepared to repudiate the state and assert their right to individual judgement in all matters'.³ This focus on the promotion of personal liberties was also shared by the avowed individualists. One of these was Auberon Herbert a former member of Parliament, who called his philosophy 'voluntaryism'.⁴ A close associate of Herbert's was Wordsworth Donisthorpe, a barrister, who, with his cousin, W.C Crofts, formed the State Resistance Union in 1880, a forerunner of the Liberty and Property Defence League (1882). Crofts was secretary of the League

¹ See Why Pay Interest: Free Currency Leaflet n. 1, (Free Currency Propaganda, London, 1899) Liberty, July. 11. 1896, and H. Seymour, The Fallacy of Marx's Theory of Surplus Value, (London, 1897).

² For example, Seymour established the Free Currency Propaganda and Albert Tarn published The Herald of Anarchy and Free Trade magazines in the early 1890's. The Herald of Anarchy was riddled with contradictions. On the one hand it announced that it defended property rights (if 'untrammelled by human law') and said that private ownership was not an evil. On the other, that it denied the right of the landlord, capitalist, tax collector, etc. The Herald of Anarchy, V. 1, n. 1, Oct. 1890.

³ A. Tarn, The Individual and the State, (London, 1891), p. 1. Two years earlier Tarn had published another individualist pamphlet entitled The State: Its Origins, its Nature and its Abolition. (London, 1889). Together with J. Greevz Fisher he made the government monopoly over the post office a favourite target for abuse.

⁴ Herbert was the world's leading advocate of voluntary taxation. For over a decade, he edited and published an individualist journal, called Free Life: Organ of Voluntary Taxation and of the Voluntary State. He was also the secretary of the Anti-Compulsory Taxation League. See A. Herbert to A. Hamon, 6. April. 1895, List 10, A. H. C, IISH.

until his death in 1894. Both he and Donisthorpe tried to keep liberty, rather than property, to the fore, but it seemed to Donisthorpe that the League was more interested in defending the privileges of property.¹ Finally there was Joseph Hiam Levy, the secretary of the Personal Rights Association.²

The ideological similarity between individualism as represented by Herbert, Levy and Donisthorpe and Anarchist individualism was quite clear. What united them was their general adherence to a doctrine of individual freedom in economic enterprise and social regulations. The individualists and the Anarchist-individualists shared a common aim of defending the individual against the growth of state power and the advance of both collectivism and monopolistic capitalism. Both proposed to dispense with government control and peacefully and gradually inaugurate a society ruled by untrammelled competition and voluntary association.

However, the gulf between individualism and Anarchist individualism in other respects was unbridgeable. The primary concern of the individualists with the preservation of existing property relations was incompatible with the individualist Anarchist objective of sweeping changes in the structure of these relations. Whereas the individualist Anarchists meant to abolish monopoly and create equal opportunities so as to rectify capitalist injustice, the straight individualists assailed no privilege, and sought to defend the vested interests of the property-owning classes.³ Furthermore, in order to safeguard property, the individualists were willing to tolerate a vestigial government, a proposition that was anathema to Anarchists.⁴ The implications of such differences prevented any real alliance.

¹ See E. J. Bristow, 'The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism', Historical Journal, V. 18, 1975, p. 773.

² Levy edited the organisations journals for many years. These included The Personal Rights Journal, Personal Rights and lastly The Individualist.

³ See N. C. Seldon, 'Laissez-Faire as Dogma: The Liberty and Property Defence League, 1882-1914', in K. D. Brown (ed), Essays in Anti-Labour History, (Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1974), pp. 208-21.

⁴ For an exposition of the differences between Individualism and Anarchist Individualism see the polemic between Tarn and Herbert in The Free Life, Oct. 3, 1890 and The Herald of Anarchy, V.1, n. 2, Nov. 1890.

In the latter part of the 1890's Anarchist individualism was in decline. It had been sustained by the existence of organisations like the Legitimation League, which involved itself in the campaign for sexual freedom.¹ Seymour was the last standard bearer of individualist Anarchism, regularly publishing pamphlets throughout the latter part of the decade. Yet he too gave up his activity before the end of the century, joining his fellow individualists who had long since removed themselves from such activity. In 1897 Seymour was bankrupt and was now calling himself a 'peaceful individualist' in order to distance himself from the Anarchist milieu.²

For a short period in the mid-1890's, the thinning Anarcho-communist ranks reacted to the worsening conditions by a minor renaissance of literary activity. Short of members to spread the idea at public meetings, activists were forced to rely on the written word. The prerequisites for regular production of journals - a competent and resourceful team and financial backing - were still available at the time. The concurrent need to reinforce the constructive side of Anarchism against its violent image only intensified the dedication of those involved in such undertakings. These included Olivia and Helen Rossetti, the nieces of the pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the poet Christina Rossetti. Their journal The Torch, appeared in October 1891. It was printed at the Torch Office (the basement of the Rossetti household in St. Edmunds Terrace). Olivia was 16, Helen 13 and Arthur 14.³ Initially the paper circulated as a hand written manuscript which the young Rossetti's sold in Hyde Park. With the closure of The Commonwealth, the girls took upon themselves the publication of a printed version of The Torch. The first issue of this Anarcho-communist journal appeared in June 1894. The Torch was a serious organ, despite the tender age of its editors and contained articles by Emma Goldman, Louise Michel, Malatesta, Emile Pouget and Sebastián Faure. British contributors included

¹ For an account of the League's career see chapter seven.

² H. Seymour to A. Hamon, 24. Feb. 1897, List 153, AHC, IISH.

³ F. Madox Ford, Return to Yesterday, (Liveright, New York, 1932), pp. 111-12.

Leggatt, Cantwell and Henry. On the literary side, the paper carried articles by Bernard Shaw, Emile Zola, Octave Mirbeau and Ford Madox Brown.

After Mrs. Rossetti's death in 1894, The Torch was moved to 127 Ossulston Street. The house they rented 'became a sort of club where the hangers on of the extreme left idled away an immense amount of time whilst their infant hostesses were extremely active'.¹ In 1896 the Rossettis resigned their positions with the journal. There are differing accounts as to why. Ford Madox Ford, and more recently John Quail, stated that the sisters felt victimised and exploited by members of their group.² William Michael however maintained that the girls merely grew out of an adolescent phase which they were passing through.³ The Torch managed to survive for a year after their departure, but without the Rossettis' money it perished.⁴

James Tochatti also sought to revive Anarchist propaganda. An ex-member of the League's Hammersmith branch which had just compromised with parliamentarianism - he watched with some concern the turn his friends had taken and felt impelled to try and reverse the trend. He began his own paper, Liberty in January 1894. Liberty was an open minded journal, reflecting the manner of its editor. It disclaimed the view of the capitalist press - that 'anarchists were criminal, madmen, or fanatics' - and held that bombastic talk and the glorification of 'men driven to desperation by circumstances' must retard the progress of Anarchist ideas.⁵ Liberty was devoted to keeping a dialogue open between Anarchists, anti-parliamentary Socialists and libertarians of more statist inclinations within

¹ Ibid., p. 109.

² Ibid., p. 113. Quail, Burning Fuse, p. 204.

³ W. M Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, (AMS Press, New York, 1970), p.452., originally published by (Brown and Langham, London, 1906). p. 453.

⁴ The defection of the Rossettis created something of a furore in the circles associated with the venture. There were many claimants to the inheritance, including Cantwell and F.S. Paul, both members of the Torch group. Nettlau however, saw the situation as an ideal opportunity to move Freedom to a more spacious office in which publishing and meetings could both take place. He and Bernard Kempfmeyer contributed ten pounds each and they leased the Ossulston Street office. O. Rossetti to M. Nettlau, March. 1896, List 224, NC, IISH.

⁵ Liberty, Jan. 1895.

the ILP.¹ However, financial difficulties and illness forced Tochatti to suspend Liberty in December 1896. On 26th July 1896 The Alarm was first issued. It was the unofficial organ of the Associated Anarchists, a group which hoped to improve Anarchist propaganda by introducing stricter organisational procedures.² However, with the boycott of the paper by other comrades, the financial problems and, above all, the internal discord, the paper soon came to an end after ten issues in November 1896.

1896-1906.

In the decade after 1896 British Anarchism was characterised by decline, with membership and activity receding. Adverse public reaction and above all the exclusion of the Anarchists from the 1896 congress of the Second International, combined to undermine its credibility. British Socialists were divided over whether to expel Anarchists from the congress. Will Thorne, James Macdonald and Edward Aveling were against admitting them.³ Keir Hardie, Tom Mann and Blatchford however, opposed their expulsion.⁴ Yet the majority of British Socialists accepted the decision.⁵ After the congress there could be no further question of unity between the two opposing wings of Socialism. It was the Anarchists however who suffered more from this division. In the aftermath of the congress Anarchist links with the wider labour movement were even more tenuous than they had

¹ Liberty, March. 1894.

² For further details see Chapter Two.

³ Justice, 29. Aug. 1896. There were more than thirty Anarchist delegates and a strong Anarcho-syndicalist group from France. The English Anarchists, Agnes Henry, Archibald Gorrie, J. Bullas, Alf Barton, J. Welsh and J. Headley acted as a delegates for many of the French Anarcho-syndicalists who were unable to attend. A. Hamon to A. Henry, 6. June. 1896, List 88, A. H. C. IISH.

⁴ The decision on the admission of the Anarchists was delayed by a quarrel within the French delegation over this very issue. By a majority of 57 to 55 the French had voted against exclusion. But, rather than accept a majority decision, the French Marxists decided to withdraw, and asked congress to authorise two French delegations, each with its own vote. Such a proposal was contrary to the general procedure of the International, which gave each country a single vote, and was supported by the German Marxists only because it happened to serve their interests. The motion was carried because the Germans had the support of a number of tiny delegations such as those of Bulgaria and Romania. The Anarchists were finally expelled on the second day. Freedom, V. 10, n. 108, Aug-Sept. 1896, p. 97.

⁵ The Anarchists held a meeting in the evening at Holborn Town Hall on the 28th July to protest at their expulsion. As well as Anarchists, Keir Hardie and Tom Mann appeared on the platform to make speeches asserting the rights of minorities, and William Morris and Robert Blatchford sent messages adding their own voice to the chorus of protest. The Clarion, 1. Aug. 1896.

been before. Anarchists now lacked an international forum and found themselves on the brink of oblivion. Not until the rise of Syndicalism did Anarchism again achieve a significant presence within Socialism.

Only a small number of activists attended the Anarcho-communist conference which took place in December 1897. Some of the participants decided to organise themselves into the West London Anarchist Group and to meet in the Communist Club in Charlotte Street. The only other practical move that resulted from the conference was the institution of lecture evenings at Tom Mann's pub in Convent Garden, *The Enterprise*.¹ Elsewhere in London, there was very little activity. The attempts to sustain the provincial groups also proved largely unsuccessful, except in Leeds and Manchester where William MacQueen and Alf Barton kept the Anarchist banner aloft. In Manchester this was illustrated by the appearance of The Free Commune which ran for a few months between 1898 and 1899.² Otherwise there was an acute shortage of enthusiasm, money and manpower in the provinces. Apart from the short lived provincial papers, from 1897 Freedom was the only paper to appear regularly.³ All this was taking place against a background of general decline throughout the Socialist movement.

The years leading up to and following the Boer war were notable for the prevailing spirit of jingoistic imperialism and the successful entrenchment of the employers in the defence of their authority. Very little could be done to stem this tide; the Anarchists had neither the speakers nor the energy to take on this battle. Indeed, during the war British Anarchism declined to its lowest point. One of the few groups to take up the anti-war cry in any exceptional way was in Leeds where the Anarchists organised a series of meetings

¹ The group responsible was known as the 'Cosmopolitans'. Its membership included Malatesta, Harry Kelly, Louise Michel, Kropotkin and W.H. Thompson, editor of Reynold's Newspaper.

² The journal was inspired by the Anarchist settlements in Essex and the North and had a strong Tolstoyan influence. Other libertarian thinkers were not ignored though, issue number three for example contained a lengthy article on Nietzsche. The Free Commune. V. 1, n. 3, Oct. 1898, pp. 1-2.

³ The infrequency of outdoor meetings caused the paper to be more dependent on voluntary subscriptions, making its fate even more precarious. A. Marsh to M. Nettlau, 23. Nov. 1897, List 199, NC, IISH.

through the South African Conciliation Committee.¹ Little else occurred besides Emma Goldman's meetings in London.² The tone of Freedom became increasingly desperate as the sense of reaction and helplessness continued to grow.³ Only a handful maintained membership of the Freedom Group itself. After the departure of Mann to Australia, The Enterprise closed and the meetings stopped. Thus, except for the publication of Freedom, British Anarchism had come to a standstill.

The war came close to, but did not succeed in, delivering the coup de grâce. However, the following years did not drastically improve the situation. Freedom was still in a bad way in 1904. Harry Kelly lamented that the group's meetings had an average attendance of only six.⁴ In the provinces, MacQueen and Barton were almost the last people still carrying out meaningful propaganda. Immediately following the height of the Boer War they issued The Anarchist Newsletter with a view to providing sorely needed 'means of communication between the comrades'.⁵ Thereafter, MacQueen concentrated on the publication of the Free Commune Pamphlets. His departure to America at the start of 1902 eventually put an end to these endeavours.⁶

The 1890's gave rise to a new emphasis within Anarchism that was characterised by ethical, humanitarian and spiritual pre-occupations. The particular kind of estrangement from contemporary social conditions and values represented by this new mood was part of a larger intellectual opposition to the materialism, commercialism and respectability of the late Victorian era.⁷ This was manifested by 'a flight from reason into theosophy, occultism

¹ Freedom, V. 14, n. 118, Sept. - Oct. 1900, p. 46.

² Mainwaring, Harry Kelly and Lothrop Withington spoke at these, the later arguing that the war was 'one of the most shameful and disgraceful' of wars. Freedom, V. 14, n. 112, March. 1900, p. 21.

³ A. Marsh to M. Nettlau, 12. March. 1900, List 199, NC, IISH.

⁴ H. Kelly's MS notes, 1906, N.C, IISH.

⁵ The Anarchist Newsletter, 31. Aug. 1900.

⁶ Until 1903, The Free Commune Press, which published this literature, worked from Leeds, and then Hull, a centre of German Anarchist refugees. From 1904 the press published its propaganda material in German.

⁷ For an account of this Anarchism with a 'higher morality' see M. Bevir, 'The Rise of Ethical Anarchism in Britain 1885-1900', Historical Research, V. 69, n. 169, 1996, pp. 143-65.

and spiritualism', and at other times into 'vegetarianism, Anti-Vivisection [and] kindness to animals'.¹ Such new tendencies were symptomatic of the general pull that ethical and quasi-religious doctrines were exerting over the labour movement. The Fellowship of the New Life, the Labour Church and the Humanitarian League were some of the bodies that bore a distinct imprint of these influences.² This spirit also penetrated the libertarian fraternity. However, the consolidation of these tendencies into a strong current within Anarchism precisely in the mid-1890's, suggests that it was not simply a reflection of wider developments. The timing of the new direction and its emphasis on the moral as well as the pacific message of Anarchism suggests that it was a manifestation of the search for a more acceptable, less violent and cataclysmic brand of Anarchism.

This idealistic current in Anarchism did not constitute a coherent body of thought. Rather it consisted of different ideas linked by similar perceptions and sources of inspiration. Fundamental to this current was a rejection of conventional scientific rationalism both as a way of explaining natural phenomena and as a means of attaining truth. Human feelings, desires and mystical impulses were the matrix and the key to social change. This form of Anarchism thus signified a sharp turn inside the orbit of Anarchism, towards introspection - towards a new awareness of the self as a source of insight into the meaning of experience and redemption. At the same time, it manifested a tendency to look

¹ J. Webb, The Flight From Reason, (London, 1971), p. 228. See for example, J. H. Levy, Our Duty to the Animal World, (London, 1913). In his Vivisection and Personal Rights, (P. S. King, London, 1902), Levy equated animal rights and personal rights: 'This question of animals rights cannot be evaded....for they are inseparable....If animals have no rights which it is our duty, as a political body, to defend, then every prosecution for cruelty to animals is an aggression on personal rights. We must, therefore, either condemn very effort of the State to prevent torture of any sentient being outside of the human race, or we must acknowledge that rights to not belong exclusively to our own sweet selves'.

² The Labour Church, established by John Trevor, was an attempt to create a church relevant to both the spiritual and material needs of working people. It stressed God's benevolent interference in the world and the importance of following him, as well as the necessity for social reform. See S. Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness, (Cornell University Ltd, London, 1973), pp. 226-245. The Humanitarian League protested 'not only against the cruelties inflicted by men on men, in the name of law, authority, and conventional usage, but also, in accordance with the same sentiment of humanity, against the wanton ill-treatment of the lower animals'. P. Gould, Early Green Politics, Back to Nature, Back to the Land and Socialism in Britain 1880-1900, (Harvester Press, Brighton, Sussex, 1988), p. 67.

at the individual in a much wider context. The individual was put in a cosmic as well as a social framework, and was told that only by uniting with the whole world would a person find their place in the universe and in society without losing their individuality. The quest for a meaningful, intelligible and just world was thus answered by a vision of a final mystical reconciliation between the two antipodal elements of existence: the microcosmic and macrocosmic. Yet as fundamental was the conviction that self-fulfilment must be accompanied by far-reaching social and economic change. Anarchism supplied this social and economic substance.

The fusion between Anarchism and the moral world picture of Christianity was the most common of these combinations. Tolstoy was a seminal influence on the Christian Anarchists, the most prolific of whom were John C. Kenworthy and John Morrison Davidson. They conceived of an all pervading God in whose divinity humanity partook. Thus their millennial state was the Kingdom of God. Yet they rejected the established church as a source of inspiration, arguing that it had renounced its moral principles and was as authoritarian as any other state institution.¹ The Christ of the Sermon on the Mount was the model of perfection towards which they aimed. He was the All Reformer, the rebel, the ultimate teacher of eternal truth. 'He abolished all private property, and with it the state. He abolished all distinctions of race, rank, sex and intellect'.² Equally, the early Christian communities, where things were held in common, were models to follow.³

For them Anarchism and Christianity pointed to the same elements as responsible for the depraved condition of society. By the same token, the message contained in Anarchism seemed to harmonise with the hopes of Christ and his followers for a higher form of human relationship and with his vision of the ideal social complex. The Tolstoyans attacked the state and dismissed the likelihood of representative institutions ever benefiting

¹ See for example J. Morrison Davidson, That Great Lying Church, (London, 1093).

² J. Morrison Davidson, Gospel of the Poor, (London, 1893), p. 49.

³ J. Morrison Davidson, 'What is Anarchism', The Weekly Times and Echo, 29. July. 1894.

humanity, on the grounds that they misrepresented the people ‘about as effectually as the clergy misrepresented Christianity.’¹ Fundamental to their thought was the conviction that the political apparatus would be replaced by a voluntary society free from government.²

Far less coherent and comprehensive, yet deriving from similar sources, was the theoretical combination which merged Anarchism with spiritualist thinking, theosophy, cosmology and eastern philosophy. These were in the main muddled amalgams of fragmented ideas assembled by Carl Quinn and Alfred Gaynor.³ Their ideas deserve treatment since they highlight the metaphysical element within Anarchism as well as the complexities of the Anarchist appeal. Their cosmos was a pantheistic living organism. Quinn enshrined the notion that ‘infinite and Eternal nature is your greater self’.⁴ Thus man shared a universal soul. ‘All of nature is our body and our body is all of nature’, he reiterated. To him, nature was divine and so was humanity. In a similar fashion, all things visible and invisible were for Gaynor, an ‘undetached part of the Great Whole’. Moreover, ‘All life centres.....are miniature reflexes of Itself’: namely, of the one and indivisible Absolute.⁵ Quinn’s spiritualist views had penetrated the core of the communist camp in the mid-1890’s. The Canning Town group switched to the advocacy of spiritualism under his influence.⁶ Like other deviations, dealing with the super-natural, spiritualism encountered the enmity of most other Anarchists who tried to put an end to it.⁷ Their efforts were probably successfully for no more was heard about spiritualism after 1897.

¹ J. Morrison Davidson, The Old Order and the New, (William Reeves, London, 1892), p. 98.

² J. Morrison Davidson, Anarchist Socialism Versus State Socialism, (William Reeves, London, 1896), pp. 8-9.

³ Quinn’s ideas were published in 1901 in a pamphlet entitled Perpetualism. They were published again in 1904 in a series of articles in The Hackney Spectator, 12. Aug to 30. Sept. 1904. Gaynor’s involvement in Anarchism amounted to no more than a literary excursion in 1895 when he published The Truth.

⁴ C. Quinn, The Scientific Religion of Perpetualism, (London, 1902), p. 6.

⁵ A. E. H. Gaynor, The Truth, (London, 1895), p. 7.

⁶ The veteran physical force revolutionary Sam Mainwaring sarcastically reported that ‘Ravachol and a few of the departed comrades have appeared to them, and they honestly believe that they will be helped by them’. S. Mainwaring to M. Nettleau, 12. Aug. 1896, List 196, N. C., IISH.

⁷ Mainwaring believed it was ‘necessary that something be done to counteract any impression [they have] made’, and along with several other comrades spoke on the same platform in Hyde

The metaphysical Anarchists were cast in the same spiritual mould as the Christian Anarchists. Their concepts manifested a deeply religious frame of mind. Indeed, Quinn who was once an avowed Tolstoyan, conceived his unconventional religiosity 'as a scientific substitute for the bankrupt Christianity'. He called his new religion the Scientific Religion of Perpetualism. The religious influence on Gaynor was as evident. By his own admission, he welded various Anarchist interpretations with astrology, Indian philosophy and the Bible. The Tolstoyan Anarchists, for their part, showed considerable interest in metaphysics. Kenworthy, for instance, confessed to being compelled by mystical theories, spiritualism and magic.¹

Although the Anarcho-Communists had tolerated one or two Christians within their ranks, by the mid-1890's the Tolstoyans, whose numbers were growing, started to coalesce into their own associations. In June 1894 several of them formed themselves into the Brotherhood Church in Croydon.² The Church held meetings and services in London, Leeds, Blackburn and a few other places.³ The search for a more satisfactory and meaningful reality was not confined to the theoretical plane. There were practical experiments too. From the mid-1890's onwards Tolstoyans attempted to construct a new order through the establishment of rural communes.⁴

The latter part of the 1890's was a disappointing period for Jewish Anarchism, although it was at this time that Rudolph Rocker first became involved with the Jewish milieu. In 1898 Rocker was invited to Liverpool by Moritz Jeger to edit the Yiddish paper

Park to 'save the corner from the embarrassment of the spiritualists'. S. Mainwaring to M. Nettlau, 1. April. 1896, List 196, N. C., IISH

¹ J. C. Kenworthy, *Tolstoy*, (London, 1902), pps. 246, 253.

² *The New Order*, Oct. 1987. For a discussion of the Tolstoyan tendency within British Socialism see Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, pps. 220-26, 245.

³ For example, Charles Daniel ran Sunday evening lectures in a house off Edgware Road and issued a monthly called *The Tolstoyan*. It was amongst his circle that there emerged a luncheon club, the Crank Table. A few of its clientele were among those who established an Anarchist commune in Wickford. Daniel helped the Anarchist cause by publishing books on matters in vogue in Tolstoyan circles, such as vegetarianism, pacifism and metaphysics.

⁴ See Chapter four for an account of this process.

Dos Freie Vort (The Free Word).¹ However, Rocker did not survive long in Liverpool. When asked by the London Anarchists to revive the Arbeter Frait, he accepted willingly, believing that the capital was a more effective place for the publication of a propaganda journal. Dos Freie Vort stopped publication on 17th September 1898. The Arbeter Frait re-appeared on October 19th 1898 and survived until January 1900. It was followed by another journal, Germinal, which was edited by Rocker. The object of the paper was 'to acquaint its readers with all Libertarian tendencies in modern literature and contemporary thought'.² Germinal was intended to appear fortnightly, but it managed to come out only intermittently during this period. Almost all other Jewish Anarchist activities had ground to a halt. Rocker again moved out of London. At the end of October 1901 he arrived in Leeds from where he continued to publish Germinal. To his surprise he found that the Jewish champions in the provinces 'had a big upward swing'.³

Rocker returned to London in the Autumn of 1902 to find a 'new spirit'. 'Everything seemed to be going forward.....The trade unions which had suffered during the depression of the South African War recovered, and a lively agitation was started. The Arbeter Frait Group was very active' and contact between the various Jewish groups in London and the provinces closer.⁴ At the end of 1902 seven provincial groups and four in London were linked into the Jewish Anarchist Federation. The Arbeter Frait which was resuscitated in March 1903 was recognised as its organ. A new group called Germinal assembled to administer the paper of the same name which resumed publication in January 1905. During these years, activity reached a new crescendo. The Jewish Anarchists set up trade unions and orchestrated the struggle against the sweating system.

¹ Rocker, The London Years, p. 108.

² Ibid., p. 144.

³ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴ Ibid., p. 159.

1906 to 1914.

From 1906 British Anarchism was to go through a phase of development in which it gradually regained its former vigour. There was an influx of new blood, veterans returned to activity, individuals regrouped and meetings were resumed. Freedom regained the same number of readers as before the war.¹ The International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam was the first sign of this revival. It was the first major international gathering of Anarchists since their expulsion from the International in 1896.² More importantly, the congress instilled a new spirit of determination in the members of the British section. This was reflected in the appearance of new groups in various parts of London, Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester, Swansea, Glasgow and Plymouth. Meeting places opened and Sunday schools and adult education courses were launched.³

Anarchist ideas were again in the air and some found expression in the attitudes of trade union activists. In the face of a reduction in real wages, aggressive employers' policies and the moderation of union officials, rank and file workers began to display increasingly militant tendencies. This climate furnished fertile ground for the implantation of ideas which advocated the overriding importance of the economic struggle to be pursued through the direct action of determined unions. As a consequence, Syndicalism and its sub-division Anarcho-Syndicalism penetrated the consciousness of sections of the labour movement.⁴ It was the Anarcho-syndicalist faction which, above all, was to undergo a

¹ A. Marsh to M. Nettleau, 24. July. 1907, N.C. IISH.

² The delegates discussed the main developments within European Anarchism, especially the growing current of Syndicalism. It also stressed the need for a strong anti-militarist propaganda to counter the growing threat of a European war. See The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam August 1907, (Freedom, London, 1907), p. 4.

³ For a description of these Anarchist education experiments see Chapter three.

⁴ While the rise of a militant spirit inside the labour movement and the spread of Syndicalist ideas before 1914 were only in a small part the product of Anarchist campaigns, they were nevertheless prefigured and anticipated by the earlier activities of Anarchists. Syndicalist ideas had already been evident in the Anarchist community as early as the 1890's. The Jewish Anarchists especially, had evinced such tendencies in their early days through their daily preoccupation with industrial activities. The indigenous Anarchists, too, had been susceptible to semi-syndicalist reasoning in the 1890's. This period saw the early beginnings of what would later flower into a fully developed movement which followed faithfully and ardently the theoretical fusion between Syndicalism and Anarchism. See chapter five.

period of expansion, while Anarchist-communism largely rested on a tiny cadre of individuals marginally growing in the former's wake. At the root of the shift of the ideological focus in favour of Anarcho-syndicalist notions was the search for a renewed contact with the workers. The former focus of Anarcho-communism on a utopian dream of an essentially rural and communal society of artisans and farmers was now superseded by a vision of an industrial society constructed according to economic function.

The isolation of Anarchism from the rest of the Socialist movement also diminished during this era. After a long interval in which Anarchist propaganda had been mainly confined to its own thinning ranks, it broke out into the wider political arena. Anarchism won a certain measure of popularity and almost re-gained the esteem it had enjoyed in the 1880's. The renewed interest in ideas akin to Anarchism generated an analogous extensive examination of its theory; it also generated an interest in co-operation with its exponents. Many Anarcho-syndicalists were able to join bodies with no specific attachment to Anarchist principles, hoping nevertheless to drive them in an Anarchist direction.¹ At the same time, and in a round about way, the growth of Syndicalist ideas revived the SDF's hostility towards Anarchism, which some members detected behind the Syndicalist force.

New Anarchist initiatives took place in the journalistic field and the publication of literature acquired a new impetus. In January 1907 The Voice of Labour was issued by the Freedom group. The aim of the paper was to educate and organise the workers for industrial direct action. Nine months later it had to close down again, but the fact of its existence at all already signalled the growing involvement of Anarchists in union activities and the growing diffusion of Anarcho-syndicalist ideas. A further lease of life was given to Anarchist industrial agitation by Guy Aldred who tried to synthesise the thought of Marx,

¹ For an account of these developments see Chapter six.

Bakunin and industrial unionism into one anti-state form of Socialism.¹ He also organised the Communist Propaganda Group in 1907. It had branches in Clerkenwell, Islington, Brixton, Glasgow, Paisley, Fife, Dundee and Aberdeen. In 1910 Aldred launched the Herald of Revolt followed in 1914 by The Spur. Because of his eccentricity, his activities were fated to be largely solitary. Still, his prolific output benefited the Anarchist, Socialist and freethought causes.

At the 1912 conference in Leeds, a new journal, The Anarchist, was launched.² It was edited by George Barrett and published in Glasgow. Barrett also began working with the Freedom group in London.³ Accordingly, in 1914 The Voice of Labour reappeared. It ran from May 1914 until August 1916. Fred Dunn was the editor and the principal contributors were Mabel Hope, George Barrett and Leonard Motler.⁴ A growing number of groups were beginning to surface at this time, but then came the outbreak of war, which put an end to what agitation and organisation there was.⁵ The various groups melted away, leaving only a few people to carry on the fight. Kropotkin's support for the allies dealt a further blow to British Anarchism.⁶ His ideological twist split the ranks and crippled their

¹ See for example his article 'Was Marx an Anarchist?' in The Herald of Revolt, V. 1, n. 9, Sept., 1911, p. 45. Aldred believed his synthesis of Marx and Bakunin would be 'unpleasant reading' for those 'alleged Anarchists', among whom he included the Freedom group. He maintained that the followers of Proudhon, Tucker and Stirner were not Anarchists. Only those who accepted the Marxist concept of class struggle qualified for the title. The Herald of Revolt, V. 3, n. 7, Aug. 1913, p. 95.

² Freedom, V. 26, n. 275, March. 1912, p. 20.

³ T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 5. April. 1913, N.C, IISH.

⁴ T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 4. Nov. 1919, List 186, NC, IISH.

⁵ For example, at a meeting in 1913, the opening of the Communist club at Ammonford in South Wales was celebrated by 120 people. The members reported: 'The Constitution and programme of the Workers Freedom Group has been shaped upon the model of the future society at which they aim, namely Anarchist-Communism. Rooms are provided and set apart for library, study circles and discussion circles'. George Davidson, the wealthy Anarchist benefactor paid for the premises. Freedom, V. 27, n. 288, April. 1913, p. 29.

⁶ Kropotkin blamed Germany for the war and came out in support of the Entente. His actions were prompted by the fear that the triumph of German militarism and authoritarianism might prove fatal to social progress in France, the revered land of the great revolution and the Paris Commune. He urged every person 'who cherishes the ideal of human progress' to help crush the German 'invasion' of Western Europe. As the bulwark of statism, the German Empire blocked Europe's path towards the decentralised society of Kropotkin's dreams. See Freedom, V. 28, n. 307, Oct. 1914, pp. 76-7. Kropotkin's espousal of the Allied cause won the approval of some of the most eminent Anarchist in Europe; in 1916, Cherkezov, Grave, Malato, Guillaume, Cornelissen and ten others joined him in signing the 'Manifesto of the Sixteen', which set forth

morale. After an attempt to resist the anti-war stand of Freedom, Kropotkin was forced to cast himself adrift from the group he had helped to initiate. During the war the remaining Anarchists either joined the war effort or were suppressed.

The period between 1906 and 1914 recorded a further expansion of activity in the Jewish Anarchist camp. Mass assemblies of thousands responded to the calls of the Arbeter Frait Group. In February 1906 the Workers' Friends Club was opened in Jubilee Street to overflowing crowds of guests.¹ European immigrants found a welcoming atmosphere at the club. Guided by Rocker, the Arbeter Frait Group extended the Anarchist promotion of direct industrial action. By 1912 the Jewish Anarchists felt strong enough to 'challenge the detested sweating system'.² The opportunity was provided by a strike of tailors in the West End of London in April 1912. Some 13,000 East End tailors, encouraged and led by the Arbeter Frait Group, subsequently came out on strike in an impressive demonstration of solidarity. The strike committee was led by Anarchists like Rocker and Kaplan and the Arbeter Frait appeared as a four page daily 'to keep the workers informed of up to date developments'.³ The strike was supported by other Jewish trade unions, and, sustained by the solidarity of the local population, ended in victory. According to Rocker the 'first months of 1914 were probably the most active period in the history of the Jewish labour movement'.⁴ The popularity of Anarchism in Jewish circles soared. But here, too, the war cut short enterprising initiatives.⁵

In this chapter a chronological overview of the development of the different currents within British Anarchism has been presented. The next chapter will examine its

their 'defencist' position. Yet, notwithstanding the prestige of these names, the majority of Anarchists remained faithful to their anti-militarist and internationalist heritage, including Malatesta, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Domela Nieuwenhuis and Rudolf Rocker. As they saw it, the war was a capitalist struggle for power and profit, with the masses serving as cannon fodder.

¹ Freedom, V. 23, n. 239, March. 1906, p. 24.

² Rocker, The London Years, p. 218.

³ Fishman, East End Radicals, p. 296.

⁴ Rocker, London Years, p. 226.

⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

social milieux, organisational forms, motivating force, recommended means and actual fields of activity. It is hoped thereby to create a more complete picture of its character and to indicate the extent and nature of its appeal.

Chapter Two. Anarchist Cultural Milieux.

The number of Anarchists in Britain was always smaller than anywhere on the continent. In estimating the actual number we can only make an informed guess. An article published in December 1894 gave the following figures for London. There were 8000 Anarchists, of whom 2000 were Russian Jews. Of the English Anarchists it said 'they number between 3000 and 4000....the latest adherents being in Canning Town and Deptford with groups of over 100 each'.¹ These figures seem far too high. Although the Deptford and Canning Town groups were among the most dynamic it is unlikely that they had 100 members. Indeed, the various references to the size of Anarchist groups indicate that their typical size ranged from six to thirty.² For there to be 4000 Anarchists in London there would have to be around forty groups of a similar size to that given for the Deptford and Canning Town groups. This was not the case. The Anarchists could mobilise 600 people on a working day and upwards of 1000 on a Sunday. Larger numbers on special occasions can be accounted for by foreign Anarchists and Socialist sympathisers. This would seem to indicate a maximum of 2000 British Anarchists in London in 1894. Even this is a generous estimate. Equally generously we could double that number for a national total. This was at a time when the ILP had 35,000 members and the SDF 10,000.³ Thus there seems little reason to dispute Hobsbawm's claim that 'there was no Anarchist movement of significance'.⁴

The circulation figures for libertarian journals further suggest that the Anarchists failed to break out from the status of sect into that of movement. Compared with The Clarion with a circulation of 70,000 in 1906, and The Labour Leader with 40,000 in 1911, the circulation figures of Anarchist journals are not impressive.⁵ Freedom sustained a

¹ The Evening News, 17. Dec. 1894.

² See The Commonweal, 3. Oct. 1903, with 12 members, Freedom, March, 1912, 10 members, The Anarchist, 3. May, 1912, 20 members, Freedom, Aug-Sept., 1913, 20 members.

³ J. Hinton, Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974, (Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1983), p. 60.

⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, London, 1984), p. 3.

⁵ For the circulation figures of various labour papers see R. J. Holton, 'Daily Herald v. Daily Citizen 1912-15', in International Review of Social History, V. 19, n. 3, 1974, p. 348.

circulation of 3,000 in its good days, declining to 500 during the barren years during the Boer War, but in 1911 the circulation increased again to 3,000.¹ The Commonweal, with Morris as editor, had an average circulation of 3,500, but steadily lost readers.² The Anarchist sold close to 1,500 issues during the 1880's.³ The Jewish Anarchist papers had a wider readership in proportion to their Yiddish reading public. In 1907 the Arbeter Fraint had an average circulation of 2,500 and Germinal of 4,000.⁴

Despite its small size, British Anarchism exhibited great diversity, harbouring different ideological tendencies and organisational frameworks. Its supporters included communist revolutionaries, libertarian individualists, rural communarians and industrial unionists. At no time did the majority of these exponents unite under one organisational umbrella; they opted instead for small, independent units, many of whom had little contact with each other. British Anarchism was clearly not a 'movement' in the sense of a closely regulated body. It should be seen instead as a collection of socio-cultural identities each of which had its own characteristics. If this is true, one may wonder whether it is actually possible to characterise a distinct Anarchist culture. I believe that it is, for despite their diversity, the various Anarchist milieux were united in their rejection of state control and social hierarchy and in their demand for the total reconstruction of the human condition. Continuity was therefore preserved despite the absence of any infrastructure and the dispersed nature of Anarchist activity. The Anarchists were united by fundamental attitudes and a vague consciousness of a common affinity. Interaction, though never comprehensive, occurred on various levels between different groupings. Thus, however varied, Anarchism should be treated as a whole.

¹ Freedom, Oct. 1893, Oct. 1907, Dec. 1911.

² See subscription lists in SL Archives, IISH.

³ The Anarchist, March. 1887.

⁴ The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam, (Freedom, London, 1907), p. 6.

By analysing the biographies of 170 Anarchists about whom sufficient information is available, it is possible to construct five different Anarchist identities.¹ These include a form of artisan Anarchism closely tied in with ultra-radicalism, the proletarian Anarchism of the post-1900 period, émigré Anarchism, Jewish Anarchism and finally middle-class intellectual Anarchism. The chart below demonstrates the size of these cultural spaces in relation to each other. It also demonstrates the dominant ideological affiliations within each category.

Socio- Cultural Class	Ideological affinity					Total
	Anarcho- Communist	Mutualist Anarchism	Individualist Anarchism	Tolstoyan Anarchism	Anarcho- syndicalist	
Artisan	30	2	0	1	5	38
Proletarian	3	0	0	3	15	21
Jewish	10	0	0	0	4	14
Émigré	21	2	0	17	9	49
Intellectual	13	4	11	16	4	48
Total	77	8	11	37	37	170

Overall, whilst allowing for exceptions, such distinctions are valid and highly instructive. The Anarchism that was adopted by the intelligentsia displayed common attitudes, temperament and manner of activity, and was different in emphasis from artisan or proletarian Anarchism.

Artisan Anarchism

Many converts to Anarchism were vulnerable craftsmen and skilled labourers working in small industries and shops: Harris, Samuels and Mowbray were tailors, while Cores and Harrigan were shoemakers. They were respectable self-educated workers who carried with them an older craft-based radicalism. Alongside them were men like Turner

¹ Should the reader wish to consult any of these biographical snippets of Anarchist activists they should contact the author who will be more than happy to supply them with the relevant details.

and Dick who ran their own grocery shops. Anarchism appealed to those whose livelihood seemed to be threatened by bureaucratic government, industrial monopolies, centralising trends, mechanisation and the redefinition of tasks.¹ Such people embraced Anarchism as it dovetailed with many of their existing views. A good example is Dan Chatterton, a shoemaker from Clerkenwell, an area dominated by small workshop trades.² Chatterton rose to prominence in the ultra-radical organisations which flourished in the 1870's, before discovering the Anarchist milieu. His writings were marked by a populist denunciation of royal, aristocratic and clerical privilege and the inequalities they championed.³ Other Anarchist artisans, like George Harris, had been associates of Bronterre O'Brien. In a similar way, artisans like Kitz, Lane and Mowbray all came to Anarchism after spells of activity within a multitude of radical organisations.⁴ For these men, the O'Brienite and ultra-radical struggle against the machinery of the aristocratic state passed into a struggle against the state itself, whose instruments of coercion and class rule included the police, law courts and Parliament.

By emphasising the coercive role of the state, Anarchists drew on indigenous traditions of hostility towards a state which remained in the grip of landed and mercantile wealth throughout the nineteenth century.⁵ This tradition was most clearly shown in G.W.M Reynolds' paper Reynold's News, the organ of 'ultra-radicalism', a creed widely disseminated among artisans. Reynold's demonstrated a distrust of the state and legal system which it combined with a vaunting of voluntary activity. The links between the

¹ The fact that technological developments and mechanisation were putting artisan workers under pressure was not lost on Anarchists. See The Torch of Anarchy V.1, n.9, 1. March. 1896, p. 131-132.

² A. Whitehead, 'Dan Chatterton and his Atheistic Communistic Scorchers', in History Workshop Journal, (25) 1988, p. 83-99.

³ See for example 'A Grasping Queen and her Pauper Whelps' in Atheistic Communistic Scorchers, n.7, Aug. 1885.

⁴ During the 1870's for example, Lane was involved in the Land Tenure Reform Association led by John Stuart Mill and the Republican campaign led by the Charles Dilke. Lane accompanied Dilke on one of his speaking tours and was even nicknamed 'Dilke's Boy'. Thompson, William Morris, p. 283.

⁵ P. Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1848-1914, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 70.

radical anti-statism of Reynold's and Anarchism were closer than one might expect. The paper featured sympathetic articles on Anarchism and allowed Anarchists to put their case to its readers.¹ It described their chief aims as the quest for justice, equality and rebellion 'against the privileged and pampered class'.² Links between Anarchism and the artisan populism of Reynold's were strengthened in the 1890's when the then editor, W.H Thompson, became a founder member of the 'Cosmopolitans', a discussion group that included Malatesta and Kropotkin.³ Reynold's actually employed Morrison Davidson, who not only wrote about the lives of prominent Anarchists, but also presented his own Tolstoyan version of Anarchism.⁴

This does not mean that the populism of artisans always led to Anarchism, only that the Anarchist case fitted in well with many established currents of artisan radicalism.⁵ Many small manufacturers and proprietors stood close to the Anarchist position in their objection to the encroaching state, as is evident by their dislike of 'unjust' business rates, distrust of compulsory schooling, health visitors and vaccination.⁶ Despite the fact that most Socialists had, by the early 1890's, concluded that the state could be used as a weapon to redress inequalities, skilled artisans had profound reservations about statist

¹ Reynold's Newspaper, 10. April. 1892, p. 1.

² Ibid., 11. March. 1894, p. 3. See also 22. Sept. 1901, p. 4.

³ The group met at Tom Mann's pub 'The Enterprise'. T. Mann, Memoirs, (Macgibbon and Kee Ltd., 1967), p. 121.

⁴ Davidson's contributions to Reynold's included articles on Bakunin, 8. Jan. 1911, p. 2, Kropotkin, 15. Jan. 1911, p. 2, Proudhon, 22. Jan. 1911, p. 2, Anarchism in Japan, 5. Feb. 1911, p. 2 and Chartism from an Anarchist point of view, 19. Feb. 1911, p. 2. Malatesta contributed articles on Italian Anarchism. Ibid., 11. Oct. 1908, p. 3.

⁵ Indeed, it has been argued that the rich libertarian traditions evident amongst the artisans who came under the influence of William Godwin, the Syndicalist type strategy of Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and William Benbow's version of the millennial strike, actually impeded the growth of Anarchism. Their rejection of state sponsored reform in favour of voluntarism, which was their legacy to the general labour movement, produced an obstinate and long held distrust of centralised authority that for many made Anarchism seem a needless extremity. G. Woodcock, Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideals and Movements, (Penguin, London, 1963), p. 415.

⁶ The Anarchists consistent denunciation of compulsory vaccination trapped into popular dissatisfaction. The vaccination laws probably aroused greater criticism than any other Victorian health legislation. See The Anarchist, V. 1, n. 11, 22. Jan. 1886, p. 1 and C. Charlton, 'The Fight against Vaccination: The Leicester Demonstration of 1885', Local Population Studies, 30, Spring, 1983.

intervention and were unequivocally hostile to those institutions which were expressions of national social policy.¹ The state was valued only in so far as it allowed expression to the cardinal virtue of 'independence'.² Moreover state welfare provision was opposed by many on the lines that it tended to replace democratic self-help organisations with a bureaucratic apparatus spawned by an alien state.³ Although it is true that a more interventionist view appealed to the less powerful in the unskilled unions who could not win their battles unaided, most unions remained united in their resistance to state intervention.⁴

For many of the artisan Anarchists, the milieu within their clubs was an important source of social and cultural satisfaction. Literary evenings, anniversaries, theatre performances and parties were all arranged.⁵ Concerts of revolutionary hymns, annual demonstrations commemorating the Commune and Chicago martyrs also took place.⁶ The lack of elaborate bureaucratic networks meant that this culture took on great importance. The familiarity and spirit apparent in many of the ultra-radical clubs shielded the Anarchists from the inimical world outside, and probably served to strengthen commitment to the cause. Events of this nature also served as good fund-raising opportunities. Typically, money in aid of some cause or person was collected through socials and dances. When in need they relied on one another for assistance.⁷ The result of all this voluntarist activity was that the Anarchism of the artisans tended to create something of an insular

¹ See H. Pelling, 'The Working Class and the Origins of the Welfare State' in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, (Macmillan and Co., London, 1968), p. 4 and J. Lewis, 'The working Class Wife and Mother and State Intervention, 1870-1918', in J. Lewis (ed), Labour and Love. Women's Experience of Home And Family, 1850-1940, (Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 99-120.

² See for example, A. Reid, 'Intelligent artisans and aristocrats of labour: the essays of Thomas Wright', in J. Winter (ed), The Working Class in Modern British History, (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 180-184.

³ P. Thane, 'The Working Class and State "Welfare" in Britain, 1880-1914', Historical Journal, V. 27, 1984, pp. 898-9.

⁴ See for example A. J. Reid, 'Old Unionism reconsidered: the radicalism of Robert Knight, 1870-1900', in E. F. Biagini and A. J Reid, Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914, (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵ See for example Freedom, V. 12, n. 130, Sept. 1898.

⁶ The Anarchist, V. 1, n. 26, April 1887, p. 4.

⁷ Freedom, V. 24, n. 252, April. 1910, p. 32.

culture based on 'personal friendship, respect for individuals; [in other words] by bonds similar to those which bound together the old craftsmen's guilds and the *compagnonnages*'.¹ In the short-term this culture would offer stability and support, but in the long-term it would prove to be a handicap. Along with the Anarchists' organisational deficiencies, it was the existence of this insular culture that explained their failure to influence more people.

The ultra-radical artisans were fully conscious of the divisions that existed between themselves and the intellectuals. The recognition of this gulf was particularly evident in the divergence between the middle-class Freedom group and the plebeian Anarchists of the SL.² This reflected the temperament of their respective editors, Wilson for Freedom and men like Samuels for the Commonweal. The latter claimed for itself the role of popular agitation and the voice of the artisan Anarchist, while Freedom maintained its image as the mouthpiece of the philosophers, providing theoretical guidance, at a distance, to Anarchist activists.³

This division between ultra-radical artisans and intellectual Anarchism was also evident within the SL itself. Kitz believed the cleavage was expressed by geography and temperament. In the West End were the respectable and literary anti-parliamentarian branches which suffered from 'anaemic respectability'.⁴ In the East End were the avowed Anarchists who 'were confronted by a fierce struggle for existence'. Kitz believed that 'many of the West End members would have found a more suitable environment and

¹ L'Ordine Nuovo, V. 1, n. 43, 3-10, April, 1920. (I am grateful to Danielle Hipkins for the translation).

² This did not mean however that the two bodies did not work together. In its earliest days the Freedom group often relied on the League for the use of the latter's hall in Farringdon Road. At times the Commonweal press facilities were used to print Freedom and branches of the SL helped distribute it. See letters of F. Charles to C. M. Wilson, June, 1889 S. L. Archive, IISH.

³ M. Nettelau, Bibliographie de l'Anarchie, (Stock, Paris, 1897), p. 173.

⁴ Freedom, V. 26, n. 279, July, 1912. Joe Lane thought that the West End branches were weakened by 'the literary middle class who only left the SDF to hang on to Morris's coat tails'. J. Lane to A. Barker, n.d. 1912, List 33, NC, IISH.

method of exposition of their ideal within the ranks of the Fabian Society'.¹ The League collapsed due to a complex combination of differing political styles, different life experiences, and to a crucial extent opposing backgrounds. Morris was able effectively, but only temporarily, to bind together the romantic anti-capitalist revolt of the intellectuals with the quite different ultra-radical traditions and revolutionary club Socialism of Kitz and Lane. Morris was an exception in that he was a craftsman and a middle-class intellectual who through sheer charisma could weld these forces together. He was one of the few middle-class activists who had the respect of the artisans. Kitz stressed that:

Unlike the arm-chair philosophers of the Wells stamp, who sell their treatises and fearsome literary concoctions, Morris...had no feeling of contempt for those who do the rough work of the movement. He was willing to share the risks which working men ran when making themselves conspicuous by outdoor advocacy of revolutionary principles.

Morris was acceptable since he was free of pretension and seemed to understand what it meant to live the worker's life. 'The whole of his poetry and prose is permeated with sympathy and love of the poor', wrote Kitz. 'This note of sympathy distinguishes him from many who surrounded him and who babbled of art, but were mere tuft-hunters devoid of any desire to raise the working-class'.²

Proletarian Anarchism

Anarchism clearly had much in common with the cultural traditions of artisans. Yet it would be quite misleading to see Anarchism merely as an artisan ideology. In the form of Anarcho-syndicalism it attracted industrial workers like Barrett, Tanner, Davis and Lawther. They embraced Anarchist ideas during the 1900's, a period in which Anarchism finally attempted to address the concerns of a mass industrial workforce and altered its anti-organisational ethos accordingly. Until that time, working-class Anarchism remained

¹ F. Kitz to the S. L., Nov. 1885, SL Archive, IISH. Morris himself realised that the conditions in which many of the plebeian members lived played a part in their ultra-radicalism. He believed Kitz 'was somewhat tinged with anarchism or perhaps one may say destructivism; but I like him very much. I called on the poor chap at the place where he lived, and it fairly gave me the horrors to see how wretchedly off he was; so it isn't much wonder that he takes the line he does.' Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 376.

² *Freedom*, V. 26, n. 277, May. 1912, p.45.

confined to artisans, based as it was on a 'rejection of late nineteenth and twentieth century social and economic organisation'.¹ Mainwaring, Leggatt and Barclay seem to have been the only 'proletarian' converts prior to 1900. The rise of Syndicalism brought more industrial workers into Anarchist circles, particularly those who shared Hillaire Belloc's misgivings about the growth of the 'Servile State' and the social control implications of Liberal welfare policy.²

The proletarian Anarchists were also aware of the differences between themselves and the intellectuals. The Anarchist proletarian whose motivating force was presumably rooted in his or her formative class experience, was above all fighting for the amelioration of their own particular socio-economic predicament. They spoke principally as representatives of the impoverished mass, on matters that were considered their exclusive province, and seemed less concerned with a search for a moral meaning to existence or with issues concerning incursions into the private life of the individual. Anarcho-syndicalists spoke the language of the class war and were concerned with the masses and their collective fate.³ Most proletarian Anarchists openly rejected the formulation of abstract theoretical schemes. Their theory, instead, took the form of 'generalised experience' closely geared to action. Indeed, Anarcho-syndicalism was a way of looking at politics, a temper which was expressed in action, rather than in clearly formulated ideas. Anarcho-syndicalist journals were written for the worker rather than the philosopher.

Adopting Anarchist beliefs was a risky move for many proletarian activists in an age when Anarchism had little public sympathy. The Anarchists were more susceptible than other workers to economic pressure from the threat of dismissal by intolerant employers.⁴ The middle-class Anarchist, with his or her own private income, was under

¹ J. Joll, *The Anarchists*. (Methuen, London, 1979), p. 261.

² See for example Barrett's article 'State Insurance' which depicted the 1911 Insurance Act as 'a big jump into the Servile State'. *Freedom*, V. 26, n. 280, Aug. 1912, p. 61.

³ For more details of the development of British Anarcho-syndicalism see Chapters 5 and 6.

⁴ Barrett, Leggatt, Paton and Blackwell all suffered discrimination because of their politics. See J. Paton, *Proletarian Pilgrimage: An Autobiography*. (George Routledge and Sons, Ltd, London), p. 230 and T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 27. Feb. 1935, List 188, NC, IISH.

much less economic pressure. This does not mean however that the middle-class recruits did not face problems. They faced deeply rooted cultural pressures which meant they had to cross what Morris called a 'river of fire'.¹

Intellectual Anarchism.

Although Anarchism did not make the same incursion into British intellectual circles as in France, it nonetheless commended itself to several writers and artists.² Like the Anarchists, the aesthetes opposed all exterior systems of moral rules and they found meaning and value in concepts like liberty and free expression.³ They too rejected the principle of authority and distrusted the bourgeoisie and its literature. The interest of such artists in Anarchism was usually eclectic, transient and diluted with reservations.⁴ Bernard Shaw, Francis Adams and Frank Harris all dabbled with Anarchism but moved on. Bernard Shaw, for example, contributed to The Anarchist during the 1880's before writing about the impossibilities of Anarchism because of its attitude to authority.⁵ Other writers and artists were attracted to the Anarchist ideal of absolute freedom, but repelled by the terrorism practised by the exponents of propaganda by deed.⁶

Others retained more sympathy. Edward Carpenter's libertarian Socialism came very close to Anarchism. His friend Henry Nevinson maintained: 'By temperament, if not

¹ Thompson, William Morris, p. 244.

² For the influence of Anarchism on the French intelligentsia see R. Sonn, Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France, (Nebraska University Press, 1988) and A. Varias, Paris and the Anarchists: Aesthetes and Subversives during the Fin de Siècle, (St. Martin's, New York, 1997).

³ Oscar Wilde took art as a model for the Anarchist project, arguing that the only milieu in which 'we have ever seen the full expression of the human personality' was 'the imaginative field of art'. H. Pearson (ed.), O. Wilde, The Soul of Man Under Socialism, De Profundis and Other Writings, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, London, 1980), p. 26.

⁴ Kropotkin's thought, in particular, created ripples in artistic and intellectual circles, yet he did not succeed in mobilising them behind Anarchist goals. See H. Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886-1917', Albion, V. 3, n. 19, 1987, pp. 373-390.

⁵ The Anarchist, V. 1, n. 1, March, 1885, p. 2, G. Bernard Shaw, The Impossibilities of Anarchism, Fabian Tract n. 45, (Fabian Society, London, 1893).

⁶ Walter Crane maintained that 'freedom of the individual is the natural accompaniment of true socialism'. As 'for Anarchism of the Kropotkin type, I find much to sympathise, but I cannot follow the violent methods of some Anarchists'. W. Crane to C. M. Wilson, 11. July, 1894, Joseph Pressburg Collection, IISH. For other sympathetic views see H. S. Salt, Seventy Years Among Savages, (London, 1921), p. 65, W. M Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, (London, 1906), V. 2, p. 45, and F. Madox Ford, Return to Yesterday, (London, 1931), p. 69.

by conviction, he was a complete anarchist, detesting all commandments, authority and forms of government'.¹ William Morris's writings were also steeped in Anarchist ideas. Kropotkin called News From Nowhere 'the most thoroughly anarchistic conception of future society that has ever been written'.² Although these intellectuals and artists were interested in other progressive forces as well as Anarchism, most of them continued to express some interest in it. A token of this sympathy could be seen in contributions to Anarchist funds or protests on behalf of imprisoned Anarchists.³ The most directly active Anarchists amongst literary and artistic circles were the teenage daughters of the Pre-Raphaelite William Michael Rossetti. They published from their house The Torch, which attracted drawings from Camille Pissarro and articles by Zola, Mirbeau and Bernard Shaw. Despite the impressive list of contributors however, one cannot help feeling that for the Rossettis The Torch provided a pleasurable distraction from the humdrum confines of middle-class life. Their Anarchism was a form of teenage rebellion and they would frequently quarrel with their parents when they refused to let them go to meetings that finished late at night.⁴

Nevertheless, Anarchists like the Rossettis were all part of a broader bohemia trying to liberate art, sexuality, the individual and society from the shackles of Victorianism. This 'late Victorian revolt' was identified in its early stages by Beatrice Webb as 'a new consciousness of sin amongst men of intellect and property'.⁵ Among the middle-class in the 1880's there grew a profound unease about their position of privilege. Nevinson recalled that 'during those years my shared sympathy with working people became an irresistible torment, so that I could hardly endure to live in the comfort of my

¹ H. W. Nevinson, 'Edward Carpenter' in A. Barrat Brown (ed), Great Democrats, (Nicholson and Watson, London, 1934), p. 111.

² Freedom, V. 10, n. 110, Nov. 1896, p. 109.

³ See for example W. Morris to F. Madox Ford, 7. Nov. 1887, in M. Morris, (ed), William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist, V. 2, (Russell and Russell, New York, 1966), p. 178.

⁴ The girls even began to smoke as part of their revolt and were rebuked for doing so by Kropotkin. B. Johnson, (eds) Tea and Anarchy!: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1890-1893, (Bartlett's Press, London, 1989), p. 147.

⁵ B. Webb, My Apprenticeship, (London, 1926), pp. 154-5.

surroundings'.¹ Olivia Rossetti remembered 'how ashamed I felt of the quite unostentatious comfort of our home'. She likened her decision to embrace Anarchism to the activism of the Russian Narodniks.² A prosperous and well educated background was a common feature amongst many of the converts to Anarchism. Cyril Bell and J. H. Levy were university lecturers. Charlotte Wilson, the wife of a stockbroker, was educated at Cambridge. It was not unknown for the converts from the bourgeoisie to give up successful business careers to propagate Anarchism, as was the case with Seymour and Kenworthy. Marsh gave up part of his inheritance for the cause.³ The commitment by materially secure Anarchists appears to have been largely an expression of growing metaphysical alienation, weariness of material possessions and a rejection of current social values.

As a doctrine that proclaimed the synthesis of individual freedom *and* social justice as the supreme ideal, Anarchism found a receptive audience among the middle-class generation that came to maturity in the heyday of English Liberalism. It promised to solve the social question and at the same time allow free play to the individual, something which many of them feared that Socialism of the Fabian variety would not necessarily do. Anarchism answered a pressing problem: 'that of moral bearings and abstract rights as opposed to the merely material right to daily bread which had first appealed to [our] sense of justice and humanity'.⁴ Middle-class Anarchism thus expressed a commitment to a type of liberty at 'one with social feeling'.⁵ Wilson described Anarchism as a combination of the 'the individualist revolt against authority, handed down to us through radicalism and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, and the socialist revolt against private ownership of the means of production'.⁶ Like many Liberal theorists, Wilson saw history as the evolution

¹ H. Nevinson, *Changes and Chances*, (London, 1923), p. 121.

² I. Meredith, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 14-15.

³ T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 27. Feb. 1935, List 188, NC, IISH.

⁴ Meredith, *A Girl Among The Anarchists*, p. 18.

⁵ *Freedom*, V. 1, n. 1, Oct. 1886, p. 3.

⁶ C. Wilson, 'Anarchism' in Fabian Society Tract n. 4, *What Socialism is*, (George Standring, London, 1886), p. 12.

and interplay of two forces, the 'passion for absolute personal freedom' and the 'desire for social unity'.¹

Many of the intellectual converts laid greater stress than their artisan counterparts on the needs of the individual. This is borne out by their ideological affiliation. Whereas Anarcho-communism drew converts from both classes, the composition of Tolstoyan Anarchism - which stressed the attainment of individual redemption - was largely intellectual. Even if the Tolstoyans did not set out to promote the interests of the egocentric individual, ultimately they still aspired to end humanity's separation from its inner self and raise the individual to the highest ethical standards. The rich spiritual life they offered, the return to a state of innocence, was clearly geared to alienated members of the bourgeoisie.

Converts from the intelligentsia were far and away the dominant group within the individualist camp as well. While focusing on economic issues, they supplanted such concerns with campaigns to extend individual liberties and pursue a revolution in habits of thought to a greater extent than the communists.² Indeed, women's rights and sexual freedom gained more attention within the camp of the Individualists. The intellectuals as a whole tended to be involved in a variety of associations. Morrison Davidson was a member of the League for the Abolition of the House of Lords, the Democratic club and the Free Railway Travel League.³ Guillaume Schack was President of the Women's Radical Association.⁴ Wilson was active in the Men's and Women's Club and the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants.

On the whole, intellectual Anarchists, particularly the Individualists, operated outside the orbit of working-class Anarchists. The intellectuals who embraced Communism

¹ C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 30. Oct. 1884, PP, UCL.

² For example, Seymour was a member of the Society for the Protection of Hospital Patients, the Personal Rights Association and the Anti-Vaccination League.

³ Morrison Davidson, *Let There Be Light*, p. 178.

⁴ Balance Sheet for 3rd Quarter of Harlesden Radical Club, 12. Dec. 1893, and Handbill for Vestry Election, 1889, St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green, North Ward, List 314, NC, IISH. In June 1897 she took part in the Willesden School Board Election with the aim of phasing out religious sectarianism in education. See G. Schack to M. Nettlau, 21. May. 1897, List 226, N. C, IISH

came into contact with their working-class comrades more frequently, but they too operated within a distinctive cultural space. This was especially true of the Freedom group. League veterans like Nicoll, Kitz and Mowbray 'looked upon them as a collection of middle-class faddists, who took up with the movement as an amusement, and regretted that Kropotkin and other serious people ever had anything to do with them'.¹ At an 1897 conference the Freedom Group was called 'an inaccessible group of arrogant persons, worse than the pope and his seventy cardinals'. Freedom was 'a philosophical, middle-class organ, not intelligible to the working-classes', and in one delegate's opinion 'less revolutionary than Comic Cuts'.² Years later Guy Aldred, a rejected collaborator, described it as 'a collection of pedantic pretenders' who had abandoned their radicalism in favour of becoming 'respectable suburban intellectuals propounding bland theories'.³

However, it is worth stressing that the 'inaccessibility' of the group was also a result of the League's behaviour. Kitz, for example, was expelled from the League in 1891 for stealing propaganda funds.⁴ Nettlau believed that it was 'this kind of un-culture' that drove people like Morris, who mistook it as typical of Anarchists, out of the League; and it was this, and the alleged involvement of the members in a milieu saturated with spies, that kept the Freedom group away from the ultra-radicals. This is part of the reason why the group had the habit of checking the credibility of comrades before accepting them into the group. It is also worth noting that their 'exclusivity' did not prevent the group offering financial support to ultra-radical artisans when they were in need, including Kitz.⁵

Nevertheless, given the lifestyle of Anarchists like Wilson, one can understand the suspicion they aroused amongst the ultra-radicals. One contemporary recalled meeting Wilson in 1886: 'She seemed to me a peaceful sort of anarchist and so did the others who

¹ Commonweal, 3. Oct. 1903.

² Freedom, V. 12, n. 127, Jan. 1898, p. 33.

³ G. A. Aldred, No Traitor's Gait!, (Strickland Press, Glasgow, 1955-57), p. 303.

⁴ See J. Bruce Glasier to J. Brown, 26. Feb. 1891, G. P. 1.1. 1891/2. 26-2. Sydney Jones Library, Liverpool.

⁵ A. Marsh to M. Nettlau, 20. Aug. 1910, List 199, NC, IISH.

came to the meetings. Someone read a paper and this was followed by discussion, lasting until Mrs Wilson interrupted with sandwiches and drinks, after which we all turned out on the Heath'¹. To men like Kitz, who were thirsting for revolution, it all seemed too genteel. Nicoll focused his resentment particularly on Wilson, whose wealth allowed her to be both a leading Anarchist and a secure member of bourgeois society. 'The Lady Superior', as he called her, had never 'dared or suffered anything for the cause'. He stated:

We can just fancy we 'ear 'em talking.....“we are the salt of the earth. Oh Lord, we thank thee we are not as other men are.....We give tithes of all we posses, we 'ave a £1000 a year which we distribute freely among the meek.....We ride in our carriage. We 'ave servants, but we 'ave not been to prison, for it is not respectable. And we talk in our drawing rooms about Ravachol and Vaillant and they say unto us, “oh dear me, Mrs Wilson! And do you really know all these dreadful people? ‘ow interesting!” And Mrs Wilson poses as one who has dared unknown dangers, and is looked upon as a kind of genteel Louise Michel. A revolutionary reputation is sometimes acquired on the cheap.”²

Nicoll's tirade touched upon an undeniable contradiction in Wilson's vision of Anarchism. He accused her of retaining the bourgeois values that were among the main targets of the Anarchist creed; her career as an Anarchist had been born out of a rejection of the very customs and pretensions that still characterised her according to Nicoll's description. Whether or not Nicoll was right in describing Wilson's style, he was accurate in seeing her as an Anarchist with no desire to risk personal danger for the cause. The Freedom group rejected the sexual hypocrisy and consumerism of bourgeois culture, but the violence and single-mindedness of ultra-radical politics had no place in its ethical creed.

Émigré Anarchism.

During periods of European repression Anarchists fled to Britain and congregated in the exile communities of London. For many years these refugees were left almost entirely alone by the authorities, much to the dismay of their foreign foes.³ This had

¹ J. Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse*, (Paladin, London, 1978), p. 60.

² *Commonweal*, 15. May. 1898.

³ For an account of British reluctance to pass legislation restricting the entry of Anarchists into Britain see R. Bach Jensen, 'The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16, (2), 1981, pp. 310-29.

important implications for British Anarchism since it meant that many émigrés were loath to jeopardise this safety by advocating extreme measures. Most émigré Anarchists adopted the concept of educative growth, rather than violent ‘propaganda by deed’.¹ The foreign colony tended to be secluded. It was only natural that the refugees kept to themselves given that they faced a society from which they were invariably alienated both in spirit and in practice. They also had to contend with the problem of language and of social adaptation in general. ‘They lived for the most part their own separate lives, segregated in their own streets, speaking their own language, following their own occupations’.²

The exiles established clubs where they could continue their native social life within a largely indifferent culture. There were three sections of the German Communist Educational Union, a Russian-Polish Association, the Swedish Socialist section, a Dutch Socialist group, the French Anarchist Group, a Yiddish speaking Club in Berner Street and the Autonomie Club, just off Tottenham Court Road. Refugees would make their way to the club which ‘at times resembled a railway station...with groups of people sitting disconsolately amidst piles of luggage’.³ While native Anarchists did frequent clubs like the Autonomie - the monthly Freedom lectures were held there in 1890 for example - the English were always in the minority and those who did not speak German or French would have found it difficult to socialise.⁴ One gets the impression that the native and immigrant groups were comrades in the common struggle, but not truly companions in the cultural sense. Die Autonomie, the German periodical of the Autonomie, spoke highly of the Freedom group, describing Wilson as ‘an idealistic’ and ‘intelligent woman’.⁵ It is

¹ On one occasion, Rocker and Kropotkin, who realised that terrorist tactics in Britain could lead to the withdrawal of political asylum, persuaded a group of fanatical young Russians, who had only just arrived in Britain, not to carry out a bomb attack on the Lord Mayor’s Show. Rocker told them he was sure ‘some Russian police agent had incited them to such a senseless outrage, to discredit the revolutionary movement, and to close England to all refugees’. Rocker remarked however, that the great majority of immigrants ‘in those years did gradually manage to adjust themselves to the new conditions’. Rocker, London Years, pp. 192-193.

² Ibid., p. 68.

³ Freedom, V. 26, n. 275, March. 1912. p. 18

⁴ H. Davis to M. Nettleau, 27. Sept. 1890, NC, IISH.

⁵ Die Autonomie, 22. Oct. 1887. (I am grateful to Danielle Hipkins for the translation).

noteworthy however, that in October 1887 Die Autonomie still had to introduce its readers to the Freedom group, at that time the most important British group, and did so as if they were related to but not really members of the international revolutionary community. However, this should not be overstated, if the Freedom group's middle-class bias and material security kept them away from the exile community, they nevertheless felt very much that they were members of the international community of Anarchist intellectuals.

The émigré presence brought disadvantages for the native Anarchists. Deprived of political outlets for their ambitions and frustrated with the oppressive situation in their homelands, many compensated for the lack of action with a surfeit of revolutionary loquacity. The wild talk sometimes took the form of infighting within the ranks, which often embroiled native activists.¹ Adding to this the fact that all operations in England involving the use of or the alleged planned use of explosives were executed by or involved foreigners,² plus the fact that some of the European outrages were rumoured to have originated in the London clubs, it is understandable why a violent picture of the foreign circles was created.³ Well publicised arrests among the exiles also ensured that the domestic Anarchists became identified with terror.

While British Anarchists were part of the close intellectual community of London Anarchism, their status as subjects of a relatively tolerant British Crown meant their lives as radicals were different from that of the émigrés, who had spent their adulthood in prison

¹ Members of the SL for example, became involved in the struggle between the followers of Victor Dave and Joseph Peukert. Dave had accused an associate of Peukert's, Theodore Reuss of being a police spy. This eventually turned out to be true, but not before a bitter war of words was waged between the two sides as to the credibility of Reuss. At a meeting of the League council on September 6th 1886, Kitz forwarded a resolution advocating the expulsion of Reuss and a motion of support for Dave. Later on it turned out that Dave and Reuss were both spies!. See F. Kitz to A. Hamon, 17. June. 1901, List 93, HC, IISH.

² Martial Bourdin, an Autonomie club member, who blew himself up in Greenwich Park in February 1894, was from France and several members of the Walsall Anarchists were Frenchmen.

³ It was alleged for example that Emile Henry got the ingredients and material for the bomb he threw into the Cafe Terminus in Paris in February 1894 from London. The Morning Leader, 17. Feb. 1894. Henry had come to London in November 1892 after planting a bomb at the offices of a mining company during a strike. Whilst in London he had frequented the Autonomie Club.

and in flight from their homelands. It must have been difficult for them to work up a great deal of ire against their own government when their exiled comrades often vocally admired the liberal traditions and political latitude of Britain. Charles Malato informed newcomers that British laws, institutions and civil liberties were exemplary, making the country the freest in the world and a 'refuge par non'.¹ Rocker was impressed by the toleration of political activity. 'I don't think there was any other country with so many open air meetings....we had nothing like it in Germany'.² Louise Michel was especially outspoken. She even admired the workhouse where the poor were put to work instead of in prison as in France.³ She reserved highest praise for English law, especially the doctrine of habeas corpus. English justice did not lock people up without proof against them, and it warned the accused that they did not have to say anything that might incriminate them. Louise respected the liberal laws of her host country, and made a conscious decision not to stir up revolution there.⁴ One should not however exaggerate the fondness felt by exiles for their adopted country. Often they felt isolated because of language barriers and the hostile attitude of natives. Malatesta claimed that his propaganda in London had been limited because he had been a foreigner in 'a country that is the most xenophobic in the world'. He particularly remembered the anti-foreigner hysteria of the 1890's when Anarchist clubs had been attacked by police-inspired crowds.⁵

¹ C. Malato to A. Hamon, 12. Jan. 1895, List 110, HC, IISH.

² Rocker, *London Years*, p. 181.

³ See A. R. Dryhurst to unknown correspondent, n.d. 1901, Dryhurst Papers, Add. MS. 46473, ff. 10-11, British Library Manuscript Room.

⁴ E. Thomas, *Louise Michel* (trans. P. Williams), (Black Rose, Montreal, 1980), pp. 320-1.

⁵ *Umanità nova*, V. 2, n. 140, 23. Sept. 1921. (I am grateful to Danielle Hipkins for the translation). British Liberalism did not win over Malatesta. He remained in constant contact with his own country's revolutionary movement and certainly did not mellow, as Kropotkin seems to have done. Kropotkin's scholarly pursuits and absorption into suburban life made him appear almost an exemplary English gentleman. His way of life dispelled any lingering suspicions about his involvement with revolutionary activity. See Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin', pp. 382-3.

Jewish Anarchism

Unlike the other foreigners, most Jewish refugees had left their countries due to religious persecution and economic discrimination and had no intention of returning. As a result they were forced to respond to local conditions in a way Gentile exiles were not. The Jewish activists were fired primarily by a vision of economic security and social integration. Yet naturalisation was difficult. After initial sympathy for the victims of pogroms, anti-Semitism, under the guise of anti-alienism, quickly appeared. It was not uncommon for English workmen, especially in times of trade depression, to see the Jews as a source of cheap labour. Given that most of the incomers could only speak Yiddish job opportunities were also limited. In their homelands the Jews lacked experience of factory work, therefore they were forced to remain working in their traditional trades when they arrived in London. As the Ghetto in the East End expanded the slum houses were filled with a proliferation of tailoring sweatshops whose physical conditions of labour were hazardous. The immigrants burned with resentment at the thought that they had exchanged tyranny under the Tsars for exploitation in 'free' Britain, and from the mid-1880's they provided many recruits to Anarchism. From its inception, the Jewish Anarchist milieu demonstrated a clear preoccupation with industrial activities, seeking to establish trade unions in order to combat the unique problems they faced.¹

The Jewish Anarchists were comfortable with small informal groups consisting of close comrades. In a sense, these groups embodied two traditions; the Russian revolutionary circles, to which some of the immigrants had belonged before coming to Britain and the talmudic scholarly groups. Bringing with them different manners and mental terminology, it was within the confines of these respective groupings that an even more isolated sub-culture developed. Given this background and the fact that the majority of their propaganda was in Yiddish, it was not surprising that the English were somewhat

¹ Rocker, *The London Years*, p. 28. For more details of this industrial activity see Chapter 5.

isolated from the Jewish milieu.¹ Jewish Anarchism was centred around the Workers' Friend Club in Jubilee Street and a mutual aid organisation known as the Workers' Circle.² The success of its educational and welfare activities seemed to vindicate Anarchist ideas of voluntarism, but it must be remembered that they were carried out by a people whose traditions inclined them to practice a high degree of co-operation as protection against external threats. Divorced from the native culture, the Jewish Anarchists felt the need to group together and depend on their own kind. Their milieu was an association of revolutionaries in which friendships and political projects were inextricably linked. The warmth of comradeship was such that the activists lived as a close knit family. In one block of flats at Dunstan House in the East End lived the Sabelinskys, Hillmans, Goldbergs, Shapiros and Liefs.³ Rocker believed that the 'comrades in the inner circle were like one big family, all friends and neighbours, bound together in one close common bond'.⁴

Anarchist Organisation.

The way Anarchists organised themselves reflected their aim of erecting a new order in which no traces of authoritarianism remained. Intrinsic to Anarchism was the belief in the interrelationship of strategy and goals, namely that the instruments of change must be the foundation of the post-revolutionary society, and hence imbued with the same spirit. Thus, the Anarchists were determined to expunge any suspicion of authoritarianism from their own circles. The question posed a dilemma. On one hand, they recognised that some degree of concerted action was indispensable for success. On the other, the political associations they saw around them all appeared to manifest some authoritarian elements. As a result, Anarchist writings were pervaded by anxiety about the sheer principle of

¹ See the notice of parades by 'our Jewish comrades' in Commonweal, 15. Sept. 1888 and Rocker's description of the Freedom group in The London Years, p. 184.

² Rocker, London Years, p. 218.

³ Typescript of N. Dick talking to A. Whitehead, 5. Nov. 1985, MSS. 21/1538/4, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁴ Rocker, London Years, p. 237.

organisation. To Anarchists, organisation per se threatened to violate the individual sovereignty and spontaneity on which they relied to bring about change.¹

All Anarchists agreed that any combination should be the outgrowth of voluntary activity and local control. A key principle was the need for decentralisation. Aiming at introducing a novel quality of relationship into the Anarchist denomination, the Anarchists hoped to avoid the defects inherent in any organisation by preventing the growth of hierarchical and centralised forms of association and self-perpetuating bureaucracy to which the members owed allegiance. Such systems, it was felt, in addition to undermining the integrity of the leaders, submerged the spontaneity of the led. The leaders and the led were to be undifferentiated. On the Anarchist principle that an individual could not transfer their liberty and rights to a representative, the democratic procedure of the delegation of power and majority rule were also rejected.²

The one organisation which best stood the test of Anarchist scrutiny was the local autonomous group consisting of a core of activists. Having dispensed with bureaucracy and the pre-allocation of functions, the inner structure of each group was distinctly uncomplicated. The necessary jobs were performed by whoever was capable and available. Only the domain of publication required occupational skills and full-time involvement: the editors and printers of Freedom and the Arbeter Frait were the only full-time salaried officials. 'A suggestion that paid speakers and secretaries would be desirable for the welfare of the propaganda was indignantly repudiated' at a conference in 1913. The 'principle of voluntary activity as the driving force....was found to be the only condition of successful agitation'.³ Accordingly, there was no registration of membership and no payment of dues.

¹ Freedom, V. 25, n. 272, Dec. 1911, p. 92. L. S. Bevington, Anarchism and Violence, (Freedom, London, 1896), p. 4.

² W. Gilmour, The Creed of Liberty, (London, 1895), p. 4, and A. Tarn, The Individual and the State, (London, 1891), p. 10.

³ Freedom, V. 27, n. 288, April, 1913, p. 29.

The Anarchists consciously opted for small groups, a preference that reflected their objective of basing future society on small communities where individual freedom could be preserved.¹ From an Anarchist perspective, small, self-reliant and self-motivating groups arising organically out of the needs of the members generated improvisation, co-operation and solidarity, without resorting to artificial means or external incentives.² Besides, highly populated groups were not necessarily conducive to change, while 'a minority ignoring the laws can demoralise all governmental machinery and render it impotent'.³ History taught the Anarchists that it was not 'immense multitudes that have accomplished great changes, but small bodies who have the courage of their convictions'.⁴

In their meetings, the Anarchists made no use of a chairman in order to show in a small way that governmental organisation was unnecessary. Meetings were conducted without standing orders and minutes were not taken: 'Anarchists do not have a Chairman, but when enough people had assembled, someone stood up and began to speak'.⁵ 'Anyone could speak when and how he pleased, so long as he received the approbation of the meeting. Generally speaking the meetings were very orderly'.⁶ In order to avoid the subordination of the minority to majority will, the meetings were run without a mechanical process of decision making. This was a statement of their belief that authoritarian means were not necessary. To illustrate their ideal, the Anarchists resorted to a biological metaphor: the arrangement within an Anarchist organisation was compared to the harmony between the parts of the body.⁷ Yet the absence of a mechanism for resolving differences meant that many meetings were spent on inconclusive debates in which it was 'found impossible to decide anything in the shape of what action be taken'.⁸

¹ Ibid.

² An Anarchist Manifesto, (London, 1895), p. 12.

³ The Torch, Aug. 1894.

⁴ The Commonweal, V. 2, n. 25, 13. April. 1894, p. 2.

⁵ H. W. Nevinson, Fire of Life, (London, 1935), p. 53.

⁶ P. Latouche, Anarchy: Its Methods and Exponents, (Everett, London, 1908), p. 133.

⁷ What Anarchists Fight For, (Freedom, London, 1909), p. 2.

⁸ C. Quinn, Manifesto of the Associated Anarchists, (London, 1896), p. 2.

Loyal to the principle of decentralisation, the groups always remained self-governing bodies. They never assumed the character of branches and no core endowed with the authority to demand compliance was allowed to develop. That this was a deliberate Anarchist proclivity is evident in the growth of Anarchism within the SL. The more they became Anarchist, the more the regional branches became independent from the General Council in London.¹ Not long after the Anarchists became the dominant force, the council disappeared altogether. The more formal inter-group links were maintained by conferences and by the few federations that arose from time to time. Both reflected the Anarchist conception of non-authoritarian and voluntary co-operation, but also the limit of Anarchist readiness to experiment with wider organisation.

Federalism was a concept intimately bound up with Anarchism. Promising co-ordination while preserving each group's independence, federalism was considered the most agreeable to Anarchist demands for decentralised inter-action. In the conduct of their larger associations the Anarchists did not diverge from their local practices. The federations had no council or other bureaucratic apparatus. Neither were paid officials employed to co-ordinate activities. Rejecting the delegation of effective power to a small group of representatives, the conferences and federations were open to all. No elections or votes on resolutions occurred on a majority basis. Only opinions were expressed and co-ordination planned. This fragmentation of the organisational structure and the avoidance of the institutionalisation of roles prevented a polarisation between leaders and led. There was no hierarchy on which the members spent their energy in an attempt to climb their way to the top. The status of the more influential members was based on their individual merit, not upon any official function.

In between conferences and the infrequent federations, the national papers, particularly Freedom and the Arbeter Fraint, filled the vacuum created by the absence of

¹ See for example, J. Bruce Glasier to F. Kitz, 21. Feb. 1890, Burns Papers, Add. Mss 46345. V. LXV. Brit. Lib. Manuscript Room.

administrative machinery. The reports they carried made them permanent media of communication between groups. Otherwise, the lax horizontal communication was maintained by personal links.¹ Indeed, because Anarchism lacked a regulatory centre, the personal factor was vital. Anarchism reflected individual initiative, however transient. Their literary production is a case in point. Anarchists were infamous for their single-handed publications.² Individual initiatives were even more responsible for political activity. Anarchist groups were usually created by a few individuals out to propagate Anarchism through the medium of a paper. In other cases new groups were sparked off by existing groups or emerged from within Socialist bodies. Often however, the creation or survival of a group was the result of the zeal of a single activist. George Barrett was the man largely responsible for the growth of Anarchism in Glasgow. A comrade related that Barrett started by speaking from a soapbox in the city and from a core of three the group grew to fifty. The success was largely down to Barrett who would lecture every night, write the majority of articles, edit the paper and perform countless other tasks.³

The drawback was that in the event of such resourceful individuals not creating a committed nucleus, their departure was accompanied by reduced activities or disappearance of the group. John Creaghe was largely responsible for the growth of Anarchism in Sheffield. In 1893 he left for Argentina and the group was soon in the doldrums.⁴ Again, the Anarchist branch of the SL in Norwich, which had been founded in 1886 as a small group of about half a dozen, numbered more than 150 a year later.⁵ This success was largely due to the activities of Mowbray. Yet shorn of material security, Mowbray was forced to leave the town. After his departure the Norwich group lost much

¹ Freedom, V. 1, n. 11, Aug. 1887, p. 86.

² Dan Chatterton for example, was the sole contributor, compositor, printer and vendor of his paper The Scorchers. He sold on average just one copy of the paper each day! The Atheistic Communistic Scorchers, V. 1, n. 7, Aug. 1885.

³ Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage, pp. 219-221

⁴ Freedom, V. 9, n. 98, Oct. 1895, p. 45.

⁵ The Commonweal, 21. July. 1888.

of its vigour.¹ The Anarchists thus paid for the lack of an administrative infrastructure and for their dependence on individual fortunes. The deliberate attempts to operate with minimal organisation prevented the entrenchment of a network of local strongholds serving as permanent channels of activity and recruitment centres.

By the mid-1890's it became increasingly clear that British Anarchism consisted of several diminutive factions, none of which could claim a substantial following. Realising this, Anarchists started to question their attitudes to organisation, and some even left their groups, 'disgusted with the lack of system'.² Awareness of the need for better organisation also gave birth to suggestions for improvements. The first attempt came with the establishment of the Associated Anarchists in December 1895. The group was ran along the lines of a traditional political party with weekly contributions, secretary, chairman and treasurer. These positions were elected every three months by a majority. The group had concluded that for successful agitation 'some non-compulsory agreements be arrived at'. They were careful to stress that the majority would not decide but only 'guide collective action' and that the individual would always have the right to abstain from any decision. They further suggested that the members be subjected to a more rigid routine than before: 'any associate absenting himself....from the society for a period of more than three months shall be considered a non-associate'.³

The group's formation was of great concern to other Anarchists. Andrews accused them of concluding that 'Anarchy has proved a failure, and that for collective action it is necessary for the minority to accept the decision of the majority'. Andrews argued that the policy of elected officials and rules that were binding to all was 'voluntary State Socialism'⁴ Tochatti agreed: with their support for voluntary submission they had

¹ Branch report to the General Council, 1887, SL Archive, IISH.

² Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist*, p. 39.

³ C. Quinn, *Manifesto of The Associated Anarchists*, (London, 1896), pp. 2-5.

⁴ *Freedom*, V, 10, n. 107, July, 1896, p. 87.

relinquished any right to be called Anarchists.¹ As Tochatti realised, this short-lived experiment with tighter organisation represented a theoretical departure which the inner logic of Anarchism could not accommodate. Indeed, whereas from now on Anarchists would be increasingly willing to experiment and acquiesce in better co-operation between groups, the vulnerable area of intra-group procedure remained more sensitive. In addition, any serious reconsideration of the organisational structure was still premature in the mid-1890's.

It was the rise of Anarcho-syndicalism after 1900 which influenced the organisational thinking of activists. Under Anarcho-syndicalism, the workers were to be organised in industrial units, each governed from below, 'recognising only the organic agreement of all'.² The activities of the workers in each industry were to be co-ordinated on a federal basis, with no centralised authority to impose its decisions from above. The underlying assumption being that an efficient organisation would increase rather than decrease the strength of individuals, the Anarchists who embraced Syndicalism stipulated that the danger of organisation 'is more than compensated by the world it opens to Anarchist activities'.³

Only in the field of Anarcho-syndicalism, a theory based on mass union formations rather than on small propaganda groups, were local and individual interests sufficiently subordinated to allow for the serious attempt at the establishment of national federations. However, this should not be over-emphasised. The tendency to organise small autonomous propaganda groups persisted, despite the attraction of Syndicalism, because no large Syndicalist movement arose to give a mass basis to Anarchist activities. Nevertheless, the growth of Anarcho-syndicalism ensured that more criticism of organisational forms was heard. New recruits raised their voices against dis-jointed organisation, assuring their

¹ *Liberty*, March, 1896.

² R. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, (Freedom Press, London, 1938), p. 33.

³ *Freedom*, V. 21, n. 222, Oct. 1907. See also. H. Kelly, 'Organisation and Re-organisation', MSS, 1900, n. 166, Alfred Marsh Collection, IISH.

comrades that decentralisation did not necessarily entail lack of organisation and that in order to be efficient it was necessary to link up 'the various local activities into one cohesive whole'.¹

The first tangible result was the International Anarchist Federation in 1906. Its first conference was held in Liverpool and those present included groups from Liverpool, Newcastle, Glasgow, London, Birmingham and Manchester. The conference discussed the question of utilising each group's resources for the benefit of the whole federation. A monthly report from the federation president, Bertha Isenberg, was to be issued and would notify the various groups as to speaking engagements. Reports on the Federation were to be given in Freedom and the Arbeter Frait which were to act as semi-official organs. The conference concluded by calling upon all those present to unite and help the federation spread Anarchism.² A month later the new Swansea group attributed its existence to the federation, and confirmed the participants' enthusiastic acknowledgement of the value of organisation.³

Further progress was made at the 1912 Leeds conference where it was agreed that to increase the effectiveness of propaganda and exchange of speakers, the country be covered by three federated areas. The first to cover the Scottish groups; another to include the groups of Lancashire and Yorkshire and the third area to link up the groups across the South. It was also planned that the conference take place annually.⁴ A conference was accordingly held the following year in Liverpool. Unlike the Leeds conference, the 1913 meeting had an established agenda before it met, copies of which were sent to the various delegates. Although it was still 'found unnecessary to have a chairman', a secretary did take minutes. It was also proposed that 'a national propaganda secretary be chosen'.⁵ It is

¹ Ibid., Aug. 1911. See also A. Schapiro to M. Nettelau, 14. Dec. 1907, List 229, NC, IISH.

² Ibid., V. 22, n. 225, Jan. 1908, p. 7.

³ Ibid., V. 22, n. 226, Feb. 1908, p. 6.

⁴ Ibid., V. 26, n. 275, March. 1912, p. 20.

⁵ Ibid., V. 27, n. 288, April. 1913, p. 29.

thus possible that British Anarchism had embarked upon a new stage of organisational growth when it was interrupted by war. What is more revealing however, is the fact that the Anarchists were still searching for an effective national organisation at such a late date. This demonstrated clearly the central libertarian problem of a reconciliation of solidarity with personal freedom and decentralisation.

An 'Infantile Disorder'?

The mainspring of Anarchist allegiance comprised a mixture of feelings and needs. However, in view of the evident hardships for those espousing the cause, and against the background of organisations unable to offer status or promotion, the motive could best be described as a religious-like adherence to Anarchist principles and a tenacious belief in the attainability of Anarchist goals. This outlook permitted them a feeling of moral superiority, of being of the elected few which may have compensated for political isolation. A contemporary explained this source of strength by comparing himself to George Barrett, one of the unswerving champions: 'I could never share George's fanatical enthusiasm and devotion: always I'd a half-cynical scepticism upon which George used to chide me, but then he was really a poet and I was, by instinct, a politician. Anarcho-communism was for me an ultimate conception: for George it was an immediate reality'.¹

This attitude sometimes led militants into interpreting even minute evidence of Anarchist tendencies as the prelude to the approaching revolution.² Such fantasies probably helped reinforce the activists' commitment to the cause. If one was able to see the possibility of the revolution breaking out at any time, one's faith would remain intact. This sense of 'absolute presentness' was the dominant feature by which Mannheim characterised the chiliastic mentality, of which he saw the Anarchists as the perfect modern

¹ Paton, *Proletarian Pilgrimage*, p. 237.

² See for example Nicoll's comments on the 1890 police strike in *The Commonweal*, 12. July. 1890.

examples.¹ With its insurrectionism and longing for a golden age, the Anarchists' idealism certainly found a religious outlet of the millennial variety. Anarchism played upon a desire to escape historical time in a moment of apocalyptic revolutionary fury that would return people to their primal goodness.² The Anarchist utopia existed in a radically other place outside history, capable at any moment of establishing itself in the present and could therefore conceptualise only insurrectionary immediacy rather than liberal continuity or Marxist teleology.

Mannheim's criterion of absolute presentness does not conflict with Lenin's critique of Anarchist inability to deal with the present. He adjudged the difference between Bolsheviks and Anarchists to be that the latter thought about the future without understanding the present, by which he meant that their utopianism mixed with insurrectionism impeded their critical understanding of social realities.³ The belief in an imminent millennium rested on faith rather than a critical evaluation of the weaknesses of contemporary society and their own possibilities of success. The ever-present possibility of revolution sustained Anarchists, but kept them chained to 'social poetry' rather than political realities.⁴ Unsurprisingly, many of their contemporaries saw Anarchism as a millenarian ecstasy and equated it with superstitious and 'primitive' peoples.⁵

¹ K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1960), pp. 215-18.

² The use of apocalyptic imagery in an Anarchist political context was typical in our period. For example, the apotheosis of the general strike as a moral purification of the world, and as an end in itself, typifies the chiliastic attitude. *The Torch*, n. 3 (New Series), Aug. 1894, pp. 6-7.

³ Joll, *The Anarchists*, p. 174.

⁴ G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (Black and Red, Detroit, 1977), p. 74.

⁵ *Justice*, Aug. 15, 1896 and T. Bell, *Pioneering Days*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1941), p. 161. The Socialists were, and are, most likely to write off Anarchism as being mystical, while priding themselves on being 'scientific'. For a recent Marxist critique of Anarchist millenarian tendencies as a reflection of their fundamental ineffectuality and utopianism see E. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973). By contrast Temma Kaplan denies that Anarchism at the turn of the century was fundamentally millenarian, and maintains its recruits had a firm grasp of social realities. T. Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia 1868-1903*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1977).

Anarchism was dismissed by its critics as puerile and absurd. Engels called it a 'children's ailment', while Lenin dismissed it as an 'infantile disorder'.¹ Alexander Gray damned Anarchists as 'a race of intelligent and imaginative children, who nevertheless can scarcely be trusted to look after themselves outside the nursery pen'.² Such critics find company with orthodox Freudians who believe that civilisation can only exist on the basis of severe repression of instinctual drives. Anarchists, it is suggested, projected on to the state all the hatred they felt for parental authority. A serious philosophy is thus reduced to a badly resolved parricide wish or dismissed as a form of therapy for an infantile neurosis. Yet factors such as this may have sometimes entered into a person's conversion. Many Anarchists had been intelligent, sensitive children whom hardship and brutality had imbued with hatred that drove them to aberrance. Judging from family situations portrayed in his works, we must conclude for example, that John Mackay hated his father, which from a psychoanalytical perspective has obvious connections with the poet's Anarchism.

Anarchism certainly attracted a certain type of temperament. Like all extreme ideologies, it had its share of unbalanced individuals who sought a solution to their personal problems in apocalyptic revolution and who revelled in illegality for its own sake.³ Max Nomad described one such example, an Anarchist called Konrad.

He suffered from coprolalia and was unable to write a paragraph without using unprintable expressions...he had never violated the law in his life, except by the printing of his obscenities; and was actually the most timid of men. His ultra-radicalism was obviously a sort of compensation for his sense of inferiority. In one of his pamphlets he recommended arson as the best means of overthrowing the system. [His] argument culminated in the sentence: "Even a beggar can afford a few matches and paper can be found in any shit-house".⁴

¹ Engels to Sorge, April. 29. 1886, Labour Monthly, Nov. 1933, V. I. Lenin, Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965).

² A. Gray, The Socialist Tradition, (Longmans, London, 1963), p. 380.

³ See for example J. Bruce Glasier to J. Brown, 20. April. 1892, G. P, 1.1 1892/17. Liverpool.

⁴ M. Nomad, Dreamers, Dynamiters and Demagogues, (New York, 1964), p. 165.

Individuals as unbalanced as Konrad were exceptions. The majority of Anarchists were inspired by a vision of universal freedom and peace. For this ideal, they often gave up their privileges and comforts, living in a state of permanent protest and rebellion.

Anarchism was an austere personal moral and social code that attracted people who wanted a total alternative to contemporary values and whose temperaments responded to the appeal of ideas carried to their logical conclusions, regardless of the difficulties involved. Anarchism also attracted those who were temperamentally unsuited to working with others or in disciplined organisations. Dan Chatterton for example, was an oddball who seemed to court adversity, but he stands within a tradition of self-centred, obsessive and perhaps slightly unhinged personalities who embraced Anarchism.¹ An obvious comparison is Guy Aldred. One of Aldred's defects was a complete lack of any sense of humour or proportion and an extraordinary combination of self-confidence and self-conceit, which made him an enfant terrible in the many groups he joined. He was convinced of the correctness of his own views and the incorrectness of all others.² One comrade recalled that he was one of 'the most childish egoists' he had ever met.³

Despite the existence of a few 'childish egoists', Lenin's argument that Anarchism was an 'Infantile Disorder' can be rejected. However, it may be possible to see Anarchism as a stage through which individuals passed before giving in to possibilism. Exposure to Anarchist beliefs was a necessary stage in Socialist evolution, a natural step towards ideological maturity. Anarchism served as a touchstone against which the coherence and

¹ He was highly eccentric and a constant irritation to those chairing public meetings. At a meeting of the SDF, he roared at the invited speaker, Lord Brabazon, 'I'll cut your head off, I'll cut your head off'. For the interruption Justice, called him 'a blatant idiot'. Justice, 15. Jan. 1887, p. 4

² He quarrelled with many of the people he worked with including G. W. Foote among the secularists, Hyndman in the SDF and Kropotkin and Rocker among the Anarchists. He was on particularly bad terms with Rocker, who regarded him as a 'very half-baked article'. Typescript of interview between F. Rocker and A. Whitehead, 27. Sept. 1985, MSS/1538/2, MRC. Warwick, pp. 4-5.

³ W. Gallagher, Revolt on the Clyde, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1936), p. 14. Another associate recalled that 'there were those who suspected him of being in the service of the police - chiefly for the purpose of discrediting Anarchism by rendering it ridiculous'. Nomad, Dreamers, Dynamiters and Demagogues, p. 95.

morality of other viewpoints could be measured. Writing in 1900, Hart claimed that nearly all the Anarchists had gone back to the Socialist organisations they had seceded from. He explained the reversion by recalling that the early Socialist movement was largely utopian. While most members grew into practical politics, a 'few discontents', still faithful to the 'revolution, naturally went over to the anarchists as the only party left which still stood for the old ideas'. These erstwhile idealists were now back in the Socialist movement, 'riper age having brought saner ideas'.¹ Those for whom Anarchism was a manifestation of post-adolescent revolt did indeed outgrow their infatuation with ultra-leftism. The Rossettis came to see 'the almost ludicrous side of the Anarchist party....as a practical force'. Their parents certainly viewed their children's 'overstrained ideas' about Anarchism as an adolescent stage that necessitated, as William Michael recounts, a 'restraining influence and sympathetic guidance'.² Later on in hindsight, he defended such a course by reporting that his children had negotiated 'the excesses of anarchism' to land safely on the banks of maturity.³

While the Anarchists refused to dilute the purity of their beliefs, others were more flexible. The question, of course, was what were the alternatives to impossibilist propaganda and were they as undesirable as the Anarchists feared? Many seem to have concluded that they were not. The apparent success of Socialist political formulas led to the defection of one Anarchist after another in the late 1890's. They had changed their 'views as to some of the methods by which the country may become Socialist'.⁴ Merlino, for example, had concluded that Anarchists refused to 'look the practical difficulties of a social reorganisation square in the face, and admit that society is much more complicated

¹ Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist*, pp. 161, 38, 97.

² Meredith, *A Girl Amongst the Anarchists*, p. 187 and W. M Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, (AMS Press, New York, 1970), p. 452.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

⁴ See A. Henry to A. Hamon, 27. June. 1897, List 88, HC, IISH. Agnes Henry, Tom Pearson, Charlotte Wilson, Alf Barton, Henry Samuels, John Paton, Archibald Gorrie and W. B. Parker all joined the ILP. A. Gorrie to T. Keell, 3. July. 1910, Freedom Correspondence 1, A-G, IISH.

than it appears to be.’¹ He was now willing to employ electoral methods.² Carpenter had also grown impatient with Anarchist inflexibility and was even willing to allow a role for the state:

There is such a thing as evolution and great new conditions of society do not spring up out of nothing. Is it so great a folly to suppose that even the present regime may have its part to play in the evolution of anarchism?.....It is not of course that the state has “to teach us to be good” but that we are learning through things like nationalisation that there is such a thing as the common life, and to handle industries for the common good.³

It was a lesson that many Anarchists evidently took to heart when they abandoned an impossibilist position which in their younger days often expressed itself as superior defeatism.

Anarchist activism.

Although British Anarchists recommended various methods to bring about change, their main emphasis was on the education of the masses through the spoken and written word.⁴ This activity would spread the revolutionary spirit and raise the consciousness of the people, making them aware of their interests and their ability to attain them.⁵ An equally vital conviction was the belief in humanity’s instinct to revolt and its inborn desire for freedom, demonstrated in history by spontaneous risings of the oppressed.⁶ The Anarchist was thus a catalyst, not only in spurring the people to action, but by making them conscious of their dormant instincts. The Anarchists’ faith in the people’s inherent virtues often led them to show a greater respect for spontaneous actions than their Marxist

¹ S. Merlino, ‘Dangerous Fallacies’, *Liberty*, Jan. 1896.

² *Labour Leader*, 21. Aug. 1896. See also S. Merlino to J. Turner, 12. Dec. 1899, NC, IISH and *Freedom*, V. 14, n. 150, Aug. 1900, p. 34.

³ E. Carpenter to A. Marsh, 7. Oct. 1900, MC, IISH. Even the Anarchists’ best loved prophet was perhaps wrestling with the temptations of possibilism. He was, after all, very impressed by the electoral successes of organised labour. With excitement, he wrote of the victory of the Liberals in 1906: The election was ‘a victory for the workers, united with the Liberals against the Conservatives.....You can’t imagine the enthusiasm of the workers, who have felt their power’. P. Kropotkin to G. Brandes, 19. Jan. 1906, in G. Brandes, *Correspondence de Georg Brandes*, (Copenhagen, 1952-6), p. 209.

⁴ *Freedom*, V. 7, n. 76, March 1893, p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 23, n. 246, Oct. 1909, p. 78.

⁶ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 11, Aug. 1887, p. 64.

rivals.¹ Anarchists rejected the concept of historical materialism, since the notion of a series of stages through which every society passes was too inflexible and by implication too deterministic about the revolutionary possibilities presented by different societies. Such a theory underestimated the role of ideas and the importance of the 'revolutionary spirit'.² However, this 'instinctive' faith in the workers was often contradicted by the reality of working-class distaste for revolutionary politics. Consequently Anarchists sometimes became impatient, condescending and contemptuous of workers and working-class culture.³ Such attitudes consolidated the division that existed between the chosen few who shared the Anarchist vision and those who had not yet seen the light.

One of the most absorbing dimensions of activity was verbal propaganda. Whether in rented halls or working-men's clubs, Anarchists delivered lectures and conducted discussions. They also spoke on street corners and at open air rallies. Anarchist platforms sometimes drew crowds of thousands, some who were genuinely interested, others who came to obstruct or be entertained.⁴ Closely tied in with this outdoor activity was the fight for free speech. Before the advent of radio, mass communication depended on the printed or spoken word. For Anarchists these two models were closely associated, for the main source of literature sales was at open air meetings. To stop these meetings would have seriously weakened Anarchism. A lot of activity was therefore directed towards the defence of the right to hold open air meetings. This was often a dangerous activity. For although Britain was a more tolerant country than many continental regimes, the state persecuted the Anarchists more than it did other Socialists. Conducting propaganda was no easy matter.

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 5, n. 61, Dec. 1891, p. 89.

² W. C. Owen, *Anarchism versus Socialism*, (Freedom Press, London, 1904), p. 2.

³ See for example *The Torch*, n. 8, (New Series), 18. Jan. 1895, p. 13 and A. Davies to M. Nettlau, 14. April. 1908, NC, IISH. This suspicion of working-class culture was characteristic of all Socialists during our period. See C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture 1884-1914*, (Manchester University Press, 1990). For working-class indifference to revolutionary politics see G. S. Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History 1832-1982*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapter one and R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class. Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950*, (Oxford University Press, 1991), Chapter one.

⁴ Paton, *Proletarian Pilgrimage*, p. 220.

The police broke up meetings, encouraged the crowd to attack orators and closed speaking points.¹ In response the Anarchists protested against police interference with meetings.²

Public speaking apart, the Anarchists relied on the writing and printing skills of their members. The result was a wealth of papers, pamphlets and manifestos. Highest priority was given to the publication of newspapers. Of the other forms of literature, if in 1887 Lane's Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto was the only pamphlet to present the Anarchist case, by December 1900 Freedom was reported to have produced more than 80,000 pamphlets.³ The output of its pamphlets and books increased from 4,000 and 300 respectively in 1904, to 15,000 and 1,100 in 1910.⁴ Between 1910 and 1913 200,000 leaflets were printed and distributed. The Arbeter Fraint group produced almost half a million books and pamphlets during its existence.⁵

There were Anarchists who broadened the concept of education to encompass 'propaganda by deed', namely, the perpetuation of ideologically motivated acts of violence as means of mobilising the masses. Far from representing Anarchist consensus, such calculations found little support in Britain, where activists were united by a preference for stimulating the spirit of revolt through argument. Individualist and Christian Anarchism considered violence immoral, the former because no individual had a right to govern others by might, and the latter because violence destroyed 'in men the right feeling, the clear

¹ For an analysis of the relationship between the state and Anarchism see H. Shpayer, British Anarchism 1881-1914: Reality and Appearance, (PhD, London University College, 1981), especially Chapter Six. Shpayer's inference is that the police, like the public more generally, over-reacted to Anarchism because of the negative image of it.

² The Commonweal, V. 3, n. 100, 10. Dec. 1887, p. 397. At the 3rd annual conference of the SL in May 1887, the delegates were told: 'The history of the free speech struggle...can best be judged by the number of our comrades that have been arrested, fined and imprisoned during the last year'. These included Mowbray, Wardle, Lane, Mainwaring, Henderson and many more. A. Barker, 'Reminiscences of a Revolutionist', MSS, c. 1947. W/96/Barker/2. Vestry House, Walthamstow, p. 12. The struggle for free speech in Manchester lasted for several months and after a series of clashes with the police and the arrest of several Anarchists, Stockton and Birch were sentenced to six months hard labour each. In Hull the German Anarchist Club took the lead in fighting for the right of public meeting on the Corporation Field, after the local Trades Council had accepted a ruling from the Municipal Property Committee that prevented an eight hour day meeting from taking place. See Freedom, V. 5, n. 59, Oct. 1891, p. 78.

³ Freedom, V. 14, n. 49, Dec. 1900, p. 24.

⁴ Ibid., V. 26, n. 276, April. 1912, p.27.

⁵ Aldred, No Traitor's Gait, p. 309.

judgement necessary to establish a beneficent social system'.¹ As a corollary, both schools advocated passive resistance as a means of resisting the state.² Anarcho-communists and Anarcho-syndicalists did not rule out the selective use of violence as a measure of self-defence.³ It was also readily assumed that the revolution would be accompanied inevitably by violence, but violence was largely rejected as an aim itself.⁴ Working in a nation where it was possible to keep the revolutionary spirit alive by the written and spoken word, the majority accepted neither the utility of violence in their midst, nor its normative justification.

There were Anarchists, admittedly, who delivered vitriolic attacks on the causes of oppression, pleaded for heroic postures and spoke in an apocalyptic vein. Yet in acting out their anger they caused no physical harm. Their high-flown talk appears to have been more a matter of registering a protest, a demonstration of bravado, than of clear and calculated intent. Even then, recourse to the vernacular of brute force was only an episode in the life of British Anarchism in the early 1890's. Under the impact of the operations on the continent a handful of writers pressed for similar violent forms. Some recommended arson and dynamite as a means of striking terror.⁵ The most notorious spokesman was H. B. Samuels who wrote that 'we are anxiously awaiting some English Ravachols'.⁶ Yet recommendations for action along such lines were guaranteed to result in a prison sentence. In any event, these suggestions were couched in such violent rhetoric that they alienated, rather than attracted, the masses.⁷

¹ J. C Kenworthy, The Anatomy of Misery, (William Reeves, London, 1893), p. 94.

² This non-violent form of action involved non-co-operation with the organs of authority, including for instance, the refusal to pay taxes. See The Anarchist, Jan. 1887 and J. Morrison Davidson, Anarchist Socialism versus State Socialism, (William Reeves, London, 1896), p. 10.

³ C. Wilson, 'Social Democracy and Anarchism', Practical Socialist, Jan. 1886, p. 11.

⁴ Freedom, V. 10, n. 108, Aug-Sept., 1896, p. 98.

⁵ The Commonweal, 28. Nov. 1891.

⁶ Ibid., 25. July. 1893. Ravachol was a French Anarchist who apart from causing explosions at the homes of two judges in 1892, had strangled a hermit for his money. At his trial in April Ravachol had caused a sensation by appearing as the accuser and victim of society, saying that he had robbed and killed to obtain resources he could not get from work.

⁷ See for example Samuels' article on the Barcelona opera bomb. (On the 7th of November 1893 thirty people had been killed when a bomb was thrown from the balcony of the Liceo Theatre and

Many Anarchists were extremely concerned by the repercussions of such propaganda and argued that too ready admiration of Ravachol would only 'play the game of the worst enemies of Free-Communism'.¹ Those who were opposed to bombing accordingly had to spend time in countering the view that all Anarchists believed in terrorism.² At the same time, many felt that they could not sit in judgement on those who had been impelled to react to oppression with violence. Wilson declared that Anarchists looked with 'sheer horror' on destruction or mutilation, but that the outrages were the result of those driven desperate by persecution.³ Most of the Anarcho-communists shared this stance. They were in no way opposed to violence when it was a matter of mass mobilisation of the working-class, but did not see the point of putting their journals in jeopardy for the sake of wild rhetoric.⁴ Recourse to the terminology of bombs was thus restricted to a few. By the mid 1890's such language was receding. The realisation of its damaging impact, especially on the people who needed to be won over, dawned even on its most notorious advocates.

Although most of the apocalyptic talk was bravado, more conspicuously aggressive action did take place. A proportion of the émigrés always busied themselves with studying explosives and in plotting acts of terror to be executed outside Britain. A few of them went to the length of contemplating acts inside Britain; the most notorious case being that of Polti and Farnara who were jailed for plotting to bomb the stock exchange.⁵

exploded in the stalls. The bombing had been in revenge for the massacre of peasants in a revolt in Jerez.) The article combined execrable taste, callousness and hatred of the bourgeoisie. Samuels said that he was among those who welcomed the affair 'as a great and good act' because of the death of 30 'rich people' and the injury of 80 others: 'Yes, I am really pleased'. He could feel no pity for those who, 'living in luxury and splendour, never gave a thought to those on whose labors their blissful existence is built.' See The Commonweal, 25. Nov. 1893.

¹ The Commonweal, 9. July. 1892.

² See J. Morrison Davidson, Let There be Light, (William Reeves, London, 1895), p. 74. A. Herbert to C. M. Wilson, 21. July. 1894, List 1, PC, IISH.

³ C. Wilson, Anarchism and Outrage, (Freedom, London, 1893). Kropotkin agreed: 'I hate the explosions, but I cannot act as a judge to those who are driven by despair'. P. Kropotkin to N. F. Dryhurst, 30. Nov. 1893, DP, Add. Ms 46362. ff. 23-29. British Library Manuscript Room.

⁴ See Freedom, June, 1892 and The Torch, Nov. 1894.

⁵ On April 14th 1894, Francis Farnara and Giuseppe Polti were arrested for being in possession of materials intended for bomb-making. They had aroused the suspicions of the owner of an

But in this militant phase, several domestic members, too, thought about adopting physical means. The Walsall Anarchists experimented with manufacturing bombs and chemistry classes were started for interested partisans. Significantly, Coulon, an agent-provocateur, was behind these projects. In August 1894 the first of several post-offices in London was blown up at New Cross. A member of the Deptford Anarchists, Rolla Richards, was eventually arrested and jailed. On 4th November 1894 a bomb exploded on the doorstep of the Mayfair house of Reginald Brett MP. The door was blown in and windows smashed. The whole business was rather bungled insofar as it was assumed that the bomb was intended for Justice Hawkins who had sentenced the Walsall Anarchists, and who lived in the same street.¹ Apart from these exceptions there were no spectacular Anarchist crimes in Britain.²

In the Britain of these years overt aggression was directed against property not people. The encouragement of single acts of revolt led to a few symbolic attacks on material objects representing the cause of Anarchist frustration. John Barlas, for example, was arrested in 1891 for firing a revolver at Parliament. He told the policeman who arrested him that, 'I intended shooting you but then I thought it is a pity to shoot an honest man. What I have done is to show my contempt for the House of Commons.'³ At the time

engineering shop where they had gone to buy an iron pipe and had made inquiries about the possibility of having two screw caps made to fit it. This case caused quite a splash in the press since it became apparent that the bomb had been intended for use in England. When Farnara was arrested he apparently raved on about throwing a bomb into the stock exchange since there would be many rich people there. He declared that he had originally intended to take the bomb to the continent, but lacking the money he decided to use it in Britain. 'For us', he declared, 'there are no frontiers. The bourgeois are the same all the world over'. At his trial he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 20 years penal servitude and on the 4th May Polti was given ten years. See The Standard, 24. April. 1894, The Times, 4, 5 May. 1894.

¹ The Times, 19. Nov. 1894.

² The only definite Anarchist operation to have caused the loss of life in Britain was the accidental death of Martial Bourdin, who died while mishandling a bomb in Greenwich Park in 1894.

³ The Times, 1. Jan. 1892.

of the incident he was a member of the British Nihilists, who laid 'more stress on individual initiative and chemical force' and thus probably inspired him to the deed.¹

There was also the case of Christopher Davis who was arrested and tried at Stafford Assizes after smashing a jewellers shop window and stealing several rings in 1892. Davis was an unemployed gasworker who had wrapped up a brick in copies of the Walsall Anarchist and a circular entitled Anarchism: Work for all, Overwork for None and threw it through the window. He was sentenced to fifteen months. Davis declared 'I ought not to be charged with stealing at all but with taking them, I merely wished to throw them into the road to give others the chance of taking them'.² This act of defiance was designed literally and metaphorically for public consumption. The attack on property, the reference to the Walsall prisoners and the message of the circular all go to make up an example of propaganda by deed.³

The Anarchists, in their assault on the state insisted that the individual 'decide for himself the morality or immorality of any action'.⁴ As we have seen, this broad outlook could be used to justify violent acts against property and people. It also meant that even the most eccentric acts of resistance to the state could be portrayed as revolutionary. W. Kensett was imprisoned twenty-nine times between 1891-1914 for refusing to pay his poor rate.⁵ He was a member of the Citizens Defence League which was formed 'to encourage people to commit illegal acts and to defy the authorities, and further ensure them against the consequences'.⁶ It was in this spirit that Leggatt carried out his campaign of civil

¹ According to his friend, David Lowe, the cause of his act was mental disturbance caused by a batoning at the hands of the police during the Bloody Sunday disturbances. After the shooting, Oscar Wilde offered to stand surety for his good behaviour. It was largely due to his intervention that Barlas escaped with a relatively light sentence. D. Lowe, John Barlas, (Cupar, Fife, 1915), p. 8.

² The Times, 28. Jan. 1893. See also T. Bell to A. Hamon, 24. Oct. 1895, List 14. HC, IISH.

³ Davis's example inspired others. Freedom of March 1893 reported that an epidemic of window smashing had followed in Birmingham. Freedom, V. 7, n. 74, March 1893, p. 16.

⁴ Voice of Labour, 6. April. 1907, p. 78.

⁵ The Spur, V. 5, n. 11, April. 1919, p. 126.

⁶ Freedom, V. 5, n. 53, April. 1891, p. 30.

disobedience against a railway company by travelling in a first class carriage instead of third.¹

An even more original scheme was that the 'comrades should invade the galleries of the theatres, armed with bags of lice, which were to emptied on the rich occupants of the stalls below'. Schemes were also put forward to fill the carriages of the bourgeoisie with hydrogen sulphide which smelt of rotten eggs and to catapult incendiary bombs from a bus into the upper storeys of the West End mansions.² Anarchists were also called on to 'glut the police courts, libel courts and assize courts, by making the supply of cases more than the demand'.³ None of these schemes were put into effect and even if they had their precise relationship to the social revolution is unclear.⁴ More logical was the Anarchists' No Rent agitation of the early 1890's. Indeed, this was the most popular incident of civil disobedience in which Anarchists were involved since it applied to the immediate grievances of the slum dwellers.

During 1891 the Anarchists founded a 'No Rent League' and their meetings in the Boundary Street slum were excitedly attended by the residents. The choice of Boundary Street was shrewd. The London County Council had generously compensated the owners of this notorious site after acquiring it. The basis of the Anarchist propaganda was that it was the residents who needed compensating, since many of their relatives had died of typhoid. This, it seemed, could be best achieved by their refusal to pay rent. It was hoped that the publicity that this would cause would force the landlords to improve conditions.⁵ This campaign met with some success. As a result of people withholding rent, bailiffs were called in and this led in turn to the formation of an Anti-Broker Brigade to protect the

¹ T. Leggatt, A Workman's Straight talk to a Railway Company, (London, 1895).

² Hart, Confessions, p. 48.

³ The Commonweal, V. 7, n. 274, 29. Aug. 1891.

⁴ In response to such acts, Barrett was forced to stress that 'we must, however, be careful how we follow this principle [of direct action]....To be logical and true to the real meaning of the term, every act should be on the road towards....the social revolution'. G. Barrett, The Anarchist Revolution, (Bristol Workers' Freedom Group, Bristol, 1915), pp. 11-12

⁵ The Commonweal, V. 7, n. 273, 25. July. 1891.

people from their depredations.¹ Anarchists would also assist those, who having resisted the bailiffs, found themselves in court, with financial aid.²

Anarchists clearly involved themselves in a variety of activities. Yet all shared some axioms with respect to means. All Anarchists were marked by their opposition to the use of existing legislative procedures or any organs of the state as tools for social change. That the Anarchist struggle was untarnished by bourgeois politics was time and again emphasised and was affirmed as the distinction between Anarchism and Socialism.³ Participation in the political system, which the Anarchists held responsible for the protection of the exploitative economic order and for the furtherance of prejudices in society, would not only compromise the position of the revolutionaries, but also promote the existence of this very system. Even in a Socialist guise, the preservation of the state would perpetuate exploitation and authoritarian behaviour.⁴

A major criticism of the Anarchists was that by refusing to participate in traditional politics, they were left out in the cold. They may have maintained their theoretical purity, but they were condemned to wallow in the political doldrums. This weakness discouraged membership and, as we have seen, led many to reject Anarchism and embrace possibilism. Anarchism was undoubtedly anti-political in the traditional sense, in that it did not offer a programme of political change, but it did offer a platform for personal and social liberation. Therefore, if Anarchism is to be understood as a 'political movement' it can only be in the very broadest sense. For if the Anarchists failed to offer an alternative to political action, it did not stop them from taking part in campaigns where they addressed a whole range of issues.⁵

¹ See The Commonweal, V. 7, n. 274, 1. Aug. 1891, p. 87.

² Ibid., V. 7, n. 278, 29. Aug. 1891, p. 103.

³ See for example W. K. Hall, The Ballot Box Farce, (Edinburgh, 1896).

⁴ C. Wilson, Anarchism and Outrage, (Freedom, London, 1893), p. 4.

⁵ Freedom, V. 15, n. 161, Oct. 1901, p. 57.

The Anarchists based their ideas on the concept of a grouping of anti-statist forces, sometimes brought together as much by their common sense of victimisation as by any political project. Whichever concept was stressed, it was understood that its principal opposition, its main struggle was against the state. The key Anarchist concept was this rejection of the state and the proposal that social life could be regulated according to the principles already put into practice by various counter-cultures or 'counter communities'.¹ Different counter-cultures were identified by Anarchists and different qualities were noted in them, whether the solidarity of the workers on the factory floor, the economic self-sufficiency of a commune, the freedom of libertarian schools or the freedom within libertarian personal relations. Freedom described such 'centres' as fields of 'applied Anarchist activity....around which sympathisers gather'.²

The Anarchists' political tactics were designed to strengthen such counter-cultures, for they provided 'a continuous schooling [and] a university of experience'.³ The final goal was to develop counter-cultures into larger associations until they superseded the state and its allied authority structures. Landauer explained: 'the state is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently'.⁴ This meant that the Anarchists negatively defined their objective as opposition to all authority. Although this was manifested most dramatically as opposition to the state, it also meant opposition to marriage as a symptom of paternal authority, to the educational system, to all hierarchical structures.⁵ Anarchists did not content themselves with a political or even a social critique of existing conditions; only a cultural critique of the state and the dominative values underlying it would suffice.

¹ On the concept of 'Counter Community' see S. Gemie, 'Counter-Community: An Aspect of Anarchist Political Culture', in Journal of Contemporary History, V. 29, n. 2, 1994, pp. 349-67.

² Freedom, V. 19, n. 195, Jan. 1905, p. 4.

³ Rucker, Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 117.

⁴ P. Marshall, Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism, (Fontana, London, 1993), p. 21.

⁵ Freedom, V. 28, n. 307, Nov. 1914, p. 83.

While guaranteeing a wide-ranging critique, this approach tended to disperse Anarchist energy in many directions.¹ Indeed, it was precisely this dispersal of activity that made Anarchism so different from more traditional political movements. Anarchism was present as a current of activism, not as a coherent organisational presence. By moving away from an account that simply traces the evolution of Anarchism as a 'movement', the following thematic analysis of Anarchist counter-cultures will demonstrate that there was a distinct Anarchist presence within the British political culture. There were, for example, Anarchists who permeated movements that were not inconsistent with their aims. From 1889 onwards, such individuals became more aware of the importance of their trade union affiliation. This phase of activity was followed by a quiet period. Yet between 1905-14 Anarchists focused again on labour struggles during the era of the Syndicalist revolt. Anarchists also took an active part in feminist campaigns during our period. At the same time as these Anarchists were permeating the above movements, there were other Anarchists who attempted to pre-figure a new utopian social order by establishing rural communes and libertarian schools.

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 24, n. 249, Jan. 1910, p. 7.

**Chapter Three. ‘No Master High or Low’: Anarchist
Educational Experiments.**

All Socialist movements of the late 19th century were arenas of education and cultural activity in a society where the state and the 'culture industry' was just beginning to erode the popular voluntary sphere through substitution by national and corporate alternatives. Socialist movements, therefore, served as educational institutions in their own right. Socialists believed that the advent of a Socialist society would require converts who shared a collective faith in the values of self-improvement and self-culture.¹ Such values had to be cultivated diligently, for the movement depended on them. The Anarchists were no different in this respect from their Socialist comrades.²

What was original about Anarchist forays into the field of education however, was their analysis of the national education system for children and the alternatives they proposed. For the Anarchists the state system of education was authoritarian in that it fostered patriotic and deferential behaviour in its pupils and was based on coercion. The Anarchist critique of state education was also underpinned by a respect for the young as individuals with an ability to think for themselves. With this in mind the Anarchists established their own alternative schools. The Anarchists firmly believed that libertarian education could foster the kind of free consciousness without which no fundamental change in society could be expected. Apart from a brief experiment in London in the early 1890's, the main practical outlet for their analysis was in a number of Sunday and evening schools established in London and Liverpool between 1906 and the 1920's.

By analysing the intentions of adults in organising Anarchist schools, the various teaching practices and methods of management adopted, and the experience of the children, we will be able to come to a better understanding of Anarchist education theory. The following account will also tell us something about the nature of British Anarchism.

¹ Ambrose Barker explained that 'the subject of education has an immense importance. We are working for the future of mankind. We undertake the task, so to speak, of educating mankind, giving it, a broader, wider humanity'. *Freedom*, V. 17, n. 174, March. 1903. p. 10.

² For a discussion of this development see C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture: 1884-1914*, (Manchester University Press, 1990).

Although they formulated many original ideas, the Anarchist educators failed to break out of their own milieu and influence a wider community. The experiments in counter-education, meant to be a starting point for an alternative culture, embraced mostly foreign children who had already been brought up within an Anarchist sub-culture. This was despite the fact that the libertarian schools belonged to a wider tradition of independent working-class education which was at times in tune with Anarchist thought. This tradition presented a potential audience for the Anarchist educators. The tragedy was that their sectarianism prevented them from tapping into this culture.

State education and the working-class.

Between 1834 and 1870 Britain was faced with a growing population, a decrease in child labour, and, by 1870, the early indications of world competition and industrial recession. It is no coincidence that the demand for a state education system accompanied these developments. By 1870 it was becoming clear that the education system, based as it was on a variety of private and public bodies, was unable to bring a satisfactory level of elementary education to the working-class.¹ Pressure for change was organised by working-class radicals in cities like Birmingham where the need for further schools was regarded as desperate. Radicals who had once feared the state and sought to create their own education outside its indoctrinating reach, received the vote in 1867 and came to see state power as the only effective means of obtaining educational change. This brought them close to the middle-class reformers' position expressed by the National Public Schools Association and the National Education League. The League wanted local boards to be set

¹ In 1866, the Argyll Commission found that of 490,000 children requiring education in Scotland, 200,000 were receiving it in uninspected schools of doubtful merit and 90,000 were not being educated at all. In England and Wales in 1868, there were 2,531,000 children in the 6-12 age group, of whom 950,000 were in state-aided schools, 697,000 were in unaided schools, and 839,000 were not being educated at all. Despite the considerable achievements of voluntary effort, school places were still in short supply in the major centres of population and standards were low even in inspected schools. J. Lawson and H. Silver, A Social History of Education in England (Methuen and Co. Ltd, London, 1973), p. 315.

up in all districts, free schools to be maintained out of rates and education to be compulsory and subject to government inspection.

Those who pointed to the low level of popular education could also argue that the provision of education had to keep pace with the extension of the franchise. The Second Reform Act enfranchised some of the working population and it was felt that if they were educated they would use the vote in the correct manner.¹ Supporters of reform could also point to the growing threat to British industrial supremacy from countries where a national system of education was already in existence. It was an awareness that industries on the continent benefited materially from a higher standard of education that led many industrialists to support the 1870 Education Act. As a result of the act Britain was divided into school districts, within which boards were elected by the ratepayers with the brief to levy a school rate and build and maintain a Board school. The Board could insist on attendance if they wished. In 1880 however, the Mundella Act made attendance compulsory for all children. Elementary education was - by definition - exclusively for the working-class. The purpose of the Board schools was to provide the poor with education in the elements of knowledge - that is, reading, writing, arithmetic and religious knowledge - and nothing more. Britain's rulers were anxious not to encourage social mobility, believing ignorance to be the safest policy for the majority.²

Yet for many reformers, compulsory education, regardless of its quality, was progressive in that it protected children from the pressure to work and provided them with at least some basic education.³ The demand for free, compulsory, secular education, for example, was one of the main points in the programme of both the Fabian Society and the

¹ B. Simon, The State and Educational Change: Essays in the History of Education and Pedagogy. (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1994), p. 26

² Lawson and Silver, A Social History of Education in England, p. 338.

³ Robert Applegarth, as a member of the deputation from the National Education League to Gladstone in 1870, speaking as a trade unionist, described 'the great determination there is on the part of the working classes to speak for themselves on these great questions'. A conference of miners' delegates had declared 'not that they wanted more wages, not that they wanted shorter hours, or any special remedy of that sort; but the first and most important thing they have declared is, that they must have compulsory education for their children'. Ibid., p. 352.

SDF.¹ Socialists, then, saw the winning of such concessions as a worthy goal and a springboard for further advance. The Socialists agreed with the Anarchists that the educational system inculcated the values of capitalism and patriotism, but had no objection to state education as such.²

In 1902, a new education act abolished the school boards and replaced them with local education authorities nominated by county councils and responsible for elementary and secondary education.³ For the government, the problem was that voluntary schools had more children than the Board schools and standards of equipment were lower. There had to be a change in the financing. Of most concern however, was the fact that not all children were attending school and there was little central control over the curriculum. The act sought to remedy these problems and concern for education became one of the key priorities for 'National Efficiency' reformers like Sidney Webb, Chairman of the LCC Technical Education Board, and Robert Morant, a civil servant in the Education Department. The two men agreed on the need for education to be firmly controlled by a central authority as a means of improving standards. They deplored the school board system, with its assumption that education should be subject to local democracy instead of being controlled by expert opinion. Compulsory education was one of the elements in their project of a national minimum, a set of standards below which no citizen should be allowed to fall.⁴

Despite their efforts, sections of the working-class were indifferent towards the state education system that was created after 1870. This lack of interest in, or rejection of, state education has been explained in terms of the inadequacy of their income to support

¹ Justice, 1. March. 1884. In 1891 a Fabian tract stated: 'We want a national system of education, secular, compulsory and technical, at the public cost, for all classes alike'. The Workers' Political Programme (Fabian Tract n. 11), p. 9. cited in B. Simon, Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965), p. 132.

² See for example S. Oliver to H. Sparling, (n. d.) 1888, 2382, S. L. Archive, IISH and Justice, 14. April and 26. May. 1894

³ Lawson and Silver, A Social History of Education in England, p. 143.

⁴ G. Sherington, English Education, Social Change and War 1911-20, (Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 10-11.

the continued education of their children. Certainly the extension of compulsory schooling was not popular since families had their earnings cut and had to pay school fees.¹ This resistance has also been seen as a consequence of cultural deprivation, with its associated characteristics of apathy, ignorance, anti-intellectualism, immediate gratification and low expectations. Although the self-educated and skilled workers were often in favour of compulsory schooling, there were those who thought it pointless. They strongly resented the presence of truant officers and the justification for their authority. To this section of the working-class the desire of the state to educate their children was unintelligible, and the attendance officers who were the arm of the law in this matter were simply a new confirmation that officialdom was oppressive.²

However, recent research on working-class opposition to state schooling reveals that this widespread resistance to educational provision can also be seen in terms of class resistance through withdrawal from the state schooling system itself.³ The experience of working-class children within the school system often bore little resemblance to the rhetoric of educational providers, who invariably celebrated the development of the schooling system as a flower of democracy planted by a benevolent middle-class. In fact, much of the school routine was experienced as an imposition, with little relevance to the world of the working-class child. Such schooling was widely experienced by both children and parents as an oppressive constraint, and this hostility towards state coercion provoked strong resistance.⁴ Stephen Humphries argues that this resistance can be seen as proof of a strong

¹ The Royal Commission of 1888 reported 'the indifference of parents to education for its own sake must, we fear, be reckoned as an obstacle which has perhaps been aggravated by compulsion, and presumably not yet reached its worst'. H. Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, (MacMillan and Co., London, 1968), p. 4. Compulsory schooling also prevented working-class children from helping their parents at home with chores and often stopped them looking after younger siblings while their parents worked. For working-class hostility to compulsory schooling on the above lines see A. Davin, Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914, (River Oram Press, London, 1996).

² F. M. L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900, (Fontanna Press, London, 1988), p. 35.

³ S. Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels: An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995).

⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-3.

class conflict over the form of education that working-class children should receive. Opposition to state schooling was rooted in three grievances. Its compulsory nature threatened the domestic economy; its regimentation and repressive form abused the fundamental personal liberties that many working-class parents accorded their children; and its removal of character development and work from the community to a depersonalised and bureaucratic setting was widely felt to be an infringement of the customary rights of the family.

As a result, working-class parents often responded to the introduction of compulsory attendance regulations not by sending their children to state schools, but by extending the length of their child's education in private schools. The form of education preferred by many parents was illustrated by the networks of dame schools, common day schools and private adventure schools that persisted throughout the 19th century.¹ After 1870 this tradition was challenged and working-class private schools were closed down, but the process took a long time. Working-class private schools were self-financing and beyond the bureaucratic regulation of the state. Parents favoured these schools for a number of reasons: they were small and close to the home and were consequently more personal and more convenient; they were informal and tolerant of irregular attendance and unpunctuality; they were not segregated according to age and sex; they used individual as opposed to authoritarian teaching methods; and, most important, they belonged to, and were controlled by, the local community rather than being imposed by an alien authority. The significance of these schools in the present context lies in the fact that they constituted a forerunner of the libertarian initiatives. They were products of a culture that distrusted formality, state control and had little time for compulsory attendance. They offered 'an education that was fully under the control of its users, it was an education truly of the

¹ See P. Gardener, The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England, (Croom Helm, London, 1984).

working-class and not for it'.¹ Although these schools were certainly not Anarchist, it is within this tradition that the Anarchist experiments belong.

The history of libertarian schools forms a dissenting movement against the state education system that has largely been unrecorded. These schools were the product of a working-class Anarchist culture, attuned in personnel, atmosphere and organisation to the demands of that culture. Most of the schools were in London in the East End and developed out of a culture that rejected orthodox Judaism as well as the demands made by the state education system. Indeed, for many Jews the Anarchist schools were the only secular alternative to religious education.² The schools were under the control of their users and during their existence represented a challenge to the state's schools and its attempt to establish a particular type of education for all children.

The Anarchist critique of State Education

For the Anarchists, the fact that schooling was compulsory demonstrated the authoritarian nature of the state system. It showed how serious the government was in creating a structure which aimed at social control and social engineering.³ After considering the nature of the state's intentions in introducing the 1870 act, it was the process of education within the schools itself that was to be of importance. They attacked the act not only from a theoretical objection to state authority, but also from a practical

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Gardener's analysis of independent working-class schooling is something of a romanticisation of the social conditions and cultural quality of working-class life in the nineteenth century. Several historians have adopted a more critical perspective towards the dame schools, common day schools and private adventure schools of our period. They argue that these schools had little recognisable educational value. Working-class private schools were not schools at all but 'merely baby minding establishments' kept by 'illiterate old women'; or were 'mock schools' under the charge of moral and intellectual incompetents. Products of an earlier and unenlightened age, such places possessed little or no educative value and were doomed to natural extinction as more advanced forms of 'mass' education were developed. See B. Simon, *Studies in the History of Education 1780-1870*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1960), p. 184, G. Sutherland, *Elementary Education in the Nineteenth Century*, (Historical Association, London, 1971), p. 12 and S. Maclure, *A History of Education in London 1870-1990*, (Penguin Press, London, 1990), p. 16.

² No doubt the desire for a secular education was as much of a driving force as the desire for libertarian education. See for example the interview with Lou Appleton, a former member of one of the London Modern Schools in *Lib Ed*, V. 2, n. 10, 1989, p. 8.

³ *Freedom*, V. 12, n. 120, June, 1898, p. 41.

objection to the poor quality of education that was administered.¹ The Board schools, 'with their military discipline' and 'system of rigid police-like inspection and examination' were denounced as havens of order and obedience.² Mobility within schools was controlled by timetables and bells. Actions were monitored and either rewarded or punished. All autonomy of the individual was undermined by the teacher. Given the power invested in adults over children, through means of reward and punishment, children were treated as passive objects condemned to be deferential.³ The Anarchist critique of the authoritarian education in the Board schools was strengthened with the passing of the 1902 Act and the establishment of a compulsory system controlled centrally by codes of regulation and a system of inspection which propagated the interests of the nation.⁴ Even more significant was the way in which children learned habits of 'submission' and obedience, 'the gendarme was installed in the breast'.⁵

Anarchist critics of compulsory education also considered the whole experience of state schooling from the view point of the child. Without a focus on the ways in which the meekness and deference that was expected of children in schools could be rejected, any transformation of schooling would always be incomplete from the Anarchist perspective:

From the first years in which [children] are capable of understanding, they are the victims of despotic authority....The child has no right to a desire of its own, cannot say anything, do anything. No attempt is made to educate the child's reason by explaining *why*. Always authority, and the inculcation of obedience. Never the slightest attempt to aid the development of the child's nature....Can we wonder that men stoop so readily to authority?....Nor can we wonder as long as education is authoritarian, that the one thing never attained is education, development.⁶

¹ See Freedom, V. 1, n. 2, Nov. 1886, p. 9, and Commonweal, V. 4, n. 129, 30. June. 1888, p. 204.

² Freedom, V. 6, n. 7, Oct-Nov. 1892, p. 7.

³ Commonweal, V. 3, n. 65, 9. April. 1887, p. 116, and V. 4, n. 129, 30. June. 1888, p. 204.

⁴ F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, The Pyramid of Tyranny, (Freedom, London, 1909), pp. 3-6. Distrust of the controlling tendencies of state education led several Anarchists to withdraw their children from school completely. M. D. O'Brien was jailed for refusing to send his children to school. The Individualist Anarchist J. Greevz Fisher formed the Parents' Defence League, whose apparent purpose was to passively resist compulsory schooling for children.

⁵ Freedom, V. 17, n. 174, March. 1903, p. 11, and M. Stirner, The False Principle of Our Education, (Ralph Myles, Colorado Springs, 1967), p. 67

⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

For the Anarchists then, education had to be freed from the authority of the teacher as well as from the state. Anarchists saw education as a spontaneous process rather than something to be imposed on the child. Memorisation, routine and the staples of conventional learning which characterised state education did nothing but destroy the imagination and prevented the natural development of children.¹

The Anarchist critique of the education system was also underpinned by a respect for children as individuals, accorded powers of initiative, a capacity for discretion and an ability to think for themselves. Anarchists were among the first educationalists to see children as equal to adults with the same needs for freedom and dignity. They belonged to themselves and accordingly should be treated with respect. 'As creators and not creatures'.² This attitude stemmed from a faith in the essential goodness of human nature. Rejecting the notion of original sin, the Anarchists insisted that children were innocent at birth and that evil was rooted in a corrupt environment and in repressive institutions. The Anarchists maintained that children were the repositories of truth and goodness that had been repressed by the authoritarian structure of the family and conventional methods of schooling.³ This belief in both the goodness of human nature and the capacity of the young to direct their own learning was to be reflected in the schools established in Britain. The three main influences on the Anarchist schools were the ideas of the French libertarian educators, propagated by Louise Michel at her International School, the theories of the Spanish Anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer and the Socialist Sunday School movement.

French Anarchist Educational theory and the International School.

In March 1890 Louise Michel established a school for the children of political refugees. Its address was 19 Fitzroy Square, London and it was known as the International School.⁴ There were many Anarchist émigrés in the Fitzroy Square area who wished to

¹ *Freedom*, V. 11, n. 119, Sept. 1897, p. 63.

² Stirner, *The False Principles of our Education*, p. 11.

³ L. Weiner, *Tolstoy on Education*, (University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 12.

⁴ *Freedom*, V. 4, n. 49, Dec. 1890, p. 58.

take their children out of the state schools because of the harshness of the regimes and the patriotic and religious nature of the teaching.¹ Margaret McMillan visited the school which was in 'a couple of dingy rooms approached by a dirty staircase, in a squalid yard'. She considered it 'the prototype of all the Anarchist schools'.² Louise was trained as a teacher and in 1865 had worked at a school in Paris. Georges Clemenceau, a close friend of Louise at this time, wrote: 'It was a strange school....It was something of a free for all, with some highly unusual teaching methods'.³ The methods of which Clemenceau wrote were considered unusual because they lacked coercion and enforced discipline. The International School's emphasis was also on liberty. Louise had no time for disciplined learning and punishment; on the contrary she encouraged her pupils to think for themselves, to explore diverse areas of interest.

Her educational theory also extolled the virtues of *éducation intégrale*, an education that cultivated the physical as well as the mental skills and developed all aspects of the child's personality. Human nature was many sided, and traditional education which had hitherto concentrated too much on theory left many sides undeveloped. Integral education therefore sought to integrate theory and practice and was related to the desire for the complete development of the individual.⁴ It also referred to the gap between school and work. An education which was derived too much from the concerns of the grammar school was wholly inadequate preparation for earning a living in a labour market which was

¹ The prospectus acknowledged this: 'Comrades wished to keep their children out of the hands of those professors of modern schools divinely inspired and licensed by the State or Church who teach, consciously or unconsciously, the doctrine of popular sacrifice to the power of the State and Church, and to the profit of the privileged classes'. Prospectus for the International School, N. C. IISH.

² M. McMillan, *The Life of Rachel McMillan*, (J. M. Sons Ltd, London, 1927), pp. 57, 59.

³ E. Thomas, *Louise Michel*, (Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1980), p. 44.

⁴ The concept of *éducation intégrale* from 'the complete worker' to 'the complete man' was the basis of educational discussion in the First International and virtually all written and accomplished endeavour by Anarchists from the 1870's to 1920. See M. P. Smith, *The Libertarians and Education*, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1983) and G. C. Fiddler, 'Anarchism and Education: *éducation intégrale* and the imperative towards fraternité', in *History of Education*, V. 18, n. 1, 1989, pp. 23-46.

stacked against ordinary workers.¹ There was also an emphasis on investing an education with the implication and effect of those wider social forces making for inertia or change. Integral education was to do this by appealing to reason as science in the sceptical view of the philosophes and, through this, by a focus on the 'rational' functions of the workshop and commune.²

The key figure in the implementation of ideas on integral education was the French Anarchist, Paul Robin. He developed a programme of integral education that was co-educational and designed to develop the physical, moral and intellectual capacities of the pupils in a non-coercive atmosphere. During the 1880's his work became well known in Anarchist circles in Britain.³ Robin emphasised the need for an education that would foster 'the harmonic development of all the faculties'. Handicrafts and technical skills were therefore given as much priority as theory. He also emphasised the need for the young to study in nature, in the workshop and in the laboratory, rather than relying on books.⁴

These were the ideas that Louise sought to put into practice in her school. She drew a great deal of inspiration from Robin's attempt to broaden the educational experiences of working-class children.⁵ Walter Crane printed a highly artistic prospectus for the school, the cover of which showed a woman wearing a liberty cap and lighting her lamp from the Sun of Truth with one hand, while feeding children the fruits of knowledge with the other. There was a caption in French 'La Solidarité Humaine', and in English

¹ P. Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1974), p. 171.

² Integral education had formed part of the programme of the Paris Commune, and although there had been little time to put the plan into effect, the experiments no doubt had a profound effect on Louise, herself a leading Communeard. See S. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, (Macmillan, London, 1973), p. 273-4.

³ See for example *Commonweal*, V. 2, n. 38, 2. Oct. 1886, *Freedom*, V. 3, n. 36, Nov. 1889, p. 52.

⁴ Robin put his ideas into practice at an orphanage in Cempuis (1880-94). At Cempuis theory was derived from the child's actual experience in the workshop. The school housed work-shops, a farm, botanical gardens, a physics and chemistry laboratory and even a meteorological station. Boys and girls were treated the same at the school, with the boys learning cooking and sewing and the girls metal and wood-work. *Ibid.*, V. 4, n. 46, Sept. 1890, p. 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 4, n. 49, Dec. 1890, p. 58.

‘From each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs’.¹ Members of the school’s committee included Morris, C. Franck, H. Koch, Kropotkin and Malatesta. Its teachers included Florence Dryhurst, Charlotte Wilson, Cyril Bell and Agnes Henry.² The teaching, in English, French and German was unpaid and the school was maintained by donations and parental contributions. There was a wide ranging curriculum and no subjects were compulsory. A lot of importance, however, was attached to foreign languages. Classes were also available in science, music, drawing, geography, needlework, gymnastics and technical education. This curriculum was much more varied than the curriculum of the Board Schools. However, it was the way in which learning took place that was important. Children were taught in very small groups and were rarely lectured as such.³ Sometimes teachers would offer particular classes, but it was not unusual for groups of children to come with their own idea of what they wanted to study. Children were encouraged to go into subjects in depth, spending as much time as their interest determined. Records were kept of what children studied, and the teachers apparently tried to strike a balance between encouraging and developing diversified interests and the autonomy of the individual child. A strong emphasis was put on teaching children to reason for themselves.⁴

By February 1892 the school had over eighty children with more waiting for places. Dryhurst reported that ‘to take them in we require a much larger staff of teachers than at present, as our object is to avoid the poll-parrot system of the Board schools, and to

¹ Michel also acknowledged a debt to Bakunin when she included a statement by him in the prospectus: ‘Education....must be founded on the development of reason, not on that of faith; on the development of personal dignity and independence, not on that of piety and obedience; on the worship of truth and justice at any cost, and above all on respect for humanity....All rational education is at bottom nothing but this progressive immolation of authority for the benefit of liberty’. Prospectus for the International School, N. C. IISH. See W. Crane, *An Artist’s Reminiscences*, (London, 1907), pp. 258-9, where the frontispiece for the prospectus is reproduced.

² *Freedom*, V. 5, n. 59, Oct. 1891, p. 78. Henry drew upon her own educational experience when teaching at the International School. She told Augustin Hamon that she had spent most of her life studying kindergarten theory. A. Hamon, *Psychologie de l’Anarchiste-socialiste*, (Stock, Paris, 1895), p. 224.

³ Prospectus for the International School, N. C. IISH.

⁴ *Commonweal*, V. 7, n. 260, April, 1891, p. 27.

give the children opportunities of learning to think for themselves'.¹ Margaret McMillan was among those who visited the school in order to help:

Louise had just finished teaching the piano....and Coulon her assistant, was teaching French. [Behind Coulon] stood the blackboard with its terrible pictures: the Chicago Anarchists hanging by the neck....“We are teaching history, you see”, observed Louise, “They will never forget it”, pointing to the class. And the class, which as a whole had enjoyed the lesson, on hearing this prophecy, smiled cheerfully.²

Not all observers were so sympathetic. Hart recalled that:

while in one part of the room the teachers tried to attract their pupils to lessons of arithmetic, Louise herself gave them lessons in piano playing, the children surrounding her, climbing on chairs, and even on her shoulders; the general noise being so great that nobody could be heard at all by either teachers or pupils.³

According to Latouche, the school closed in 1893 because ‘the scholars mostly exercised the privilege of individual liberty in refusing to submit to the tyranny of paying fees’.⁴ In her memoirs however, Louise said that the police found explosives in the school cellar. She was genuinely surprised, not knowing that one of the school’s teachers, Auguste Coulon, was a police spy. Coulon had hit on the idea of using the school as a way of keeping political exiles under surveillance.⁵ Despite its short life, the International school illustrates the way in which ideas concerning libertarian education, which were flourishing in France, attracted attention and took root in Britain, admittedly in this first instance largely among émigrés.

The Modern School Movement.

Apart from Louise’s school, the major influence on the later experiments in Britain was the growth of educational ideas under the inspiration of Francisco Ferrer, the founder

¹ *Freedom*, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 16.

² D. Cresswell, *M. McMillan, A Memoir*, with a foreword by J. B. Priestly. (Hutchinson and Co, London, 1948), p. 63-4. Another sympathetic observer remarked that the school taught its pupils ‘to disrespect their gods, laws and masters’. *The Sheffield Anarchist*, 1. Nov. 1891.

³ W. C. Hart, *Confessions of an Anarchist*, (London, 1906), p. 121. Hart was not alone in being shocked by the ‘disorder’ of the school. Henry Nevinson found that his efforts ‘to instruct the little Anarchs in the elements of drill and orderly behaviour’ were thwarted by the chaos that reigned in the small room’. H. Nevinson, *Changes and Chances*, (London, 1923), p. 3.

⁴ P. Latouche, *Anarchy!*, (London, 1908), p. 202.

⁵ Thomas, *Louise Michel*, p. 319.

of the Modern School in Barcelona and the International League for the Rational Education of Children. Like Robin, Ferrer believed in education that would be rational, where pupils would not be tied down by dogma and would be able to organise their own lessons without compulsion.¹ His pedagogical theories involved a shift from emphasis on instruction to emphasis on the process of learning, from teaching by rote and memorisation to teaching by example and experience, from education as a preparation for life to education as life itself. With 'freedom in education' as his watchword, Ferrer aimed to do away with the formality and discipline of the conventional classroom, the restrictions and regulations that suppressed individual development and divided education from play. He cultivated physical as well as mental development, crafts and arts as well as books, give and take between pupil and teacher. Hostile to dogma and superstition, he emphasised reason, observation, and science, as well as independence and self-reliance. Anti-coercive and anti-authoritarian, he stressed the dignity and rights of the child, encouraging affection in place of regimentation.

Ferrer moved to a wider concept of libertarian education than that of the French Anarchists, which from the very start stressed that the children would control the learning process: 'education is not worthy of the name unless it leaves to the child the direction of its powers and is content to support them in their manifestations'.² Ferrer created a school in which pupils were not subjected to discipline but were allowed to come and go freely and to organise their own work. He was determined to free the child from the stultifying effects of the formal classroom, with its fixation on discipline, its rigid and often irrelevant

¹ J. Joll, The Anarchists, (Methuen and Co, London, 1979), p. 234.

² F. Ferrer, The Origins and Ideals of the Modern School, (Watts, London, 1913), p. 51. As Smith has pointed out, the organisation of his school represented a movement away from the position of Robin. Concerning the concept of integral education he writes: 'Robin.....certainly believed that this meant the development of all sides of the human being, but [he] also believed that an important practical expression of this was the polytechnical apprenticeship which would give the worker more practical independence in the labour market. Ferrer was as wedded to the concept of integral education as [Robin] but the emphasis for him was on the development of the whole human being and not on the preparation of children for roles in the economy'. Smith, The Libertarians and Education, p. 47.

curriculum, its pressure for conformity and denial of originality and independence. Accordingly, a lesson often consisted of a visit to a factory or to a wood where specimens were collected and individual observation encouraged.¹

Other schools adopted Ferrer's methods and soon his influence reached far beyond Spain. In April 1908, undeterred by the closure of the school after the authorities attempted to implicate him in an attempt on the life of King Alfonso XIII (Ferrer was briefly jailed), he founded the International League for the Rational Education of Children in Paris.² In August 1909 the League lost its guiding spirit when Ferrer was arrested in Barcelona. He was executed in October after being charged with and found guilty of being the author of a rebellion during the 'Tragic Week' of July.³ Ferrer was clearly innocent, but his martyrdom led to his ideas about education spreading even wider. It was because of his execution that Ferrer became the most celebrated representative of the movement for libertarian education. One of his English disciples, Jim Dick, called on Anarchists to continue Ferrer's work:

The murder must be avenged, but in a form that will undermine the foundations that exploitation is built upon, i.e., by freeing the child's mind

¹ C. P. Boyd, 'The Anarchists and Education in Spain. 1868-1909', Journal of Modern History, V. 48, n. 4, 1976, pp. 171-2.

² The organisation had an international committee, which included Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Anatole France, Lorenzo Portet and William Heaford. The league provided a link between the modern schools in Europe and gave an impulse to the formation of new schools. Portet and Heaford, for example, were involved in several of the schools created in Britain. Ferrer's imprisonment led to the formation of an English Ferrer Committee. Freethinkers, Socialists and Anarchists came together to protest against the Spanish government's actions. After his release Ferrer visited England in order to 'express his heartfelt thanks to all who took part in the international protest against his imprisonment'. This visit proved inspirational to many, particularly Jim Dick who was to be instrumental in establishing a libertarian school in Liverpool. For an account of Ferrer's visit see Voice of Labour, V. 1, n. 32, 24. Aug. 1907, p. 163.

³ See J. Connelly Ullman, The Tragic Week, (Harvard University Press, Mass., 1968). The response to Ferrer's death was quite extraordinary. In Sheffield 12,000 people attended a meeting in Pool Square. The Socialists present burnt two effigies, one of a priest that had a notice attached declaring: 'Another Christ has been crucified to satisfy the Jesuits of Spain' and another of a soldier stating: 'Let us burn all forms of tyranny'. Among the speakers was the former Anarchist, now town councillor, Alf Barton. On 17th October 10,000 gathered in Trafalgar Square in a meeting organised by the SDP. The protests came from all sections of liberal society, for whom Ferrer was a martyr of free thought, done to death by vindictive clericalism and a reactionary state. Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle protested side by side with Malatesta. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 9. Oct. 1909.

of the prejudices that are daily inculcated by the State and Church....If you believe [Ferrer's] work to be good and effective, then set about it.¹

The Socialist Sunday School Movement.

The English libertarian schools owed much to the ideas of Ferrer. Yet the post-1907 schools were also variants on the English tradition of Socialist Sunday Schools which had developed their own comprehensive critique of state education. The Liverpool Anarchist Sunday school for example, had close links with the local Socialist schools and, as we shall see, adopted their teaching practices. The Socialist Sunday School movement was established when the first school was set up in 1892 in London by Mary Gray of the SDF. The movement soon spread throughout the country, uniting Socialists of many faiths. The schools were dedicated to teaching Socialism to working-class children and to bringing an understanding of the nature of existing society, with the aim of bringing about its transformation through political action.² Like the Anarchists, many of those involved in the Socialist Sunday Schools were advocating a new outlook, not only of teaching on enlightened lines, but also of a human attitude to discipline, and respect for children as individuals.³ Their journals carried articles about children's rights and published the activities of the Society for the Reform of School Discipline, a body committed to the abolition of corporal punishment. Moreover, they attacked the 1902 Education Act as 'a

¹ *Freedom*, V. 24, n. 252, April, 1910, pp. 29-30.

² For a discussion of the Socialist Sunday School movement see F. Reid, 'Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain, 1892-1939', in *International Review of Social History*, V. 11, n. 2, 1966, pp. 18-47.

³ See for example Alfred Russell's article 'The Social Teaching of Children' in which he declared that: 'Teachers need to pay attention to the child's mode of looking at things. Use of graphics, simple language conveying word-pictures and expressing thoughts within the child's ordinary knowledge and experience leads naturally to far-reaching conclusions. All mental force, as it may be called, should be avoided. Children are thus enabled to think for themselves, and value their opinions. They are in this way likely to become consciously intelligent. Such intelligence is a sure and effective conquering weapon for truth. General principles which involve no dogmas and are the planting of the seed, should form the scope of the teaching. Let the child-mind develop its own conclusions....The subjects taught should be such as appeal to the child mind, while conveying the truth aimed at. Teaching should be free from bookishness and elaboration and should be human and direct'. *The Labour Annual*, 1900, p. 141.

reactionary measure...a serious set-back to the progress of free, unsectarian and democratic education'.¹

From the 1890's progressive educational ideas, such as those of Friedrich Froebel, the Kindergarten pioneer, were finding a voice in Socialist education circles.² Margaret McMillan used the Socialist schools as a forum for her ideas. She was interested in the teachers who, frustrated by the restrictions in the state system, were using the Sunday Schools to experiment in educational technique. In 1908 she noted 'the new intimacy between teacher and taught' in the schools, which 'may usher in the new method...our children should write more and talk more than is possible in the day school'.³ A few of the schools tried to take the concept of learning out of the classroom, with the teachers taking classes into the countryside.⁴ A scan of reports in *The Young Socialist*, the movements' journal, reveals a varied curriculum: dancing, rambling, athletics, book clubs and performances of plays. Although the Anarchist and rationalist supporters of Ferrer found the semi-religious and 'Sunday-best respectability' of many Socialist schools distasteful, their own schools were part of the same tradition.⁵

The English Ferrer Schools.

The libertarian Sunday School which developed at the Jubilee Street Club in Whitechapel in 1906 was established by thirteen year old Nellie Ploschansky. She became demoralised by national state schooling and by the lack of facilities for young people in the working men's institutes of the East End. To begin with she helped to set up a Sunday School, which was to later grow into a larger and more regular school. The Jubilee Street club had already formed the Workers' Circle, which supported 'progressive cultural

¹ *The Reformer's Year Book*, 1903, p. 101.

² See *ILP News*, Nov. 1899.

³ *The Young Socialist*, Feb. 1908.

⁴ *Ibid.*, June. 1901.

⁵ This distaste increased when the Socialist Sunday School movement took over the framework of traditional Christian worship, introducing the Socialist Ten Commandments, which were based on justice and love. See *Freedom*, V. 25, n. 268, Aug. 1911, p. 63.

work'.¹ It was to here that Nellie was taken by her father in order to listen to lectures. Throughout 1906, as she attended, Nellie began to notice the absence of children at the classes.² It was this that determined her to ask the club to set up a school on its premises 'for working men's children....I had heard about Ferrer's school in Barcelona and that was what I wanted'. Nellie was determined that it be a school that was run freely. She remembered:

Comrades sent their children along and we read poetry and sang songs. We used to sing a poem written by Morris....called "No Master High or Low". Gradually the children got other children to come [and] the Rabbi would come out and stand in front of the door and when the children left he would follow them home and tell their parents they should not allow them to go there because it was a bad place. But the children made no mind. They liked it.³

The school remained at Jubilee Street until June 1912, when it moved to Commercial Road.⁴ Although the school was known as a 'Sunday School', it often met up to three times a week.⁵ The curriculum included science, languages, physical education, sewing, reading and recitations.⁶ The emphasis was put on allowing the children to organise themselves and to discuss topics which they felt to be important. The school organised trips as well: 'Children who had never been out in the woods came to Epping Forest. My brother came too and my sister. I remember my father saying to her "Did you have a good time?" "Yes" she said, "wonderful, there were no parents, no-one telling us what to do"'.⁷ The school aimed to open up children's minds, allowing them the

¹ Rocker, *The London Years*, p. 218.

² Typescript of Nellie Dick talking to Andrew Whitehead, 5. Nov. 1985, p. 2. MSS.21 1538/4. Modern Records Centre, Warwick University, pp. 1-2.

³ Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in *Lib Ed*, V. 2, n. 7, 1988, p. 6.

⁴ Among the Anarchists who occasionally helped out at the school were Wolf Wess and Ambrose Barker. A. Barker to M. Nettleau 5. March. 1907, List 128, NC, IISH.

⁵ Typescript Interview of Leah Feldman talking to Andrew Whitehead, 7. Oct. 1985, p. 10. MSS 21/1538/3, MRC. Warwick.

⁶ The older pupils would be instructed in sewing, often bringing material with them and mending their clothes while readings took place. This training helped prepare them for work in the tailoring trades of the East End. W. Wess to M. Nettleau, 13. March. 1907, N. C. IISH.

⁷ Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in *Lib Ed*, V. 2, n. 7, 1988, p. 6.

independence to develop their own ideas. This was in contrast to the authoritarian control within state schools.

The school also began to develop an adult section with classes in sex education, literature, theatre, poetry and languages.¹ Nellie recalled that many children from the school used to go and join the adults, and the barriers between young and old were broken down as both learned together.² In January 1907 the school celebrated the new year. After tea, the children and their families held a concert of Socialist songs.³ In March Wess reported that 'the school has broken into three classes and is much more satisfactory....We have also combined physical exercise with intellectual practice....When the warm weather comes we are always eager to get them out into the fields'.⁴ Not everyone who was involved was so enthusiastic. In 1908 A. Davies confirmed that she was 'giving [the school] up as hopeless', since 'the parents make use of it as a crèche, a convenient place to send their children to while they otherwise amuse themselves. It is all very dispiriting'.⁵

Despite such problems, the school remained part of the hidden history of libertarian education. Although small, implicit in the schools' organisation and operation was a critique of the national system of education. It was an illustration of the way in which children, and eventually a wider community, could and did develop the kind of educational institution they desired - one attuned to their culture. The school was created by a young person, which was exceptional. Controlled by its users, it ran on libertarian lines and sought to develop a curriculum which was relevant to those who attended it.

¹ Esperanto was especially popular since it was expected to foster Anarchism by creating international unity and understanding. See E. Chapelier and G. Marin, Anarchists and the International Language (London, 1908).

² The school also fostered links between the immigrant Jews and the local community with a minority of the pupils being the children of local people. Typescript of Nellie Dick talking to Andrew Whitehead, 5. Nov. 1985, MSS.21 1538/4, p. 2, MRC, Warwick.

³ At the end of the concert each child was presented with a booklet of Ruskin or Dickens. The Weekly Times and Echo, 19. Jan. 1907.

⁴ W. Wess to M. Nettleau, 13. March. 1907, List 237, NC, IISH.

⁵ A. A Davies to M. Nettleau, 14. April. 1908, NC, IISH.

The Liverpool Anarchist Sunday School was founded by Jim Dick and Lorenzo Portet in November 1908 and met at the Toxteth Co-operative Hall on Smithdown Road. By January 1909 there were thirty-eight children attending the school, and it was reported that 'the young comrades practically run the meetings'. Jim Dick declared that the aim of the school was to provide a rational education and 'to break down the national prejudices which are inculcated into the children of our present-day schools'.¹ In order to develop this spirit of internationalism the school was affiliated to Ferrer's League for the Rational Education of Children. Throughout the Spring of 1909 there was a series of lectures. Kavanagh spoke on 'The Paris Commune', Fairbrother on 'An Englishman's Home' and Junior on 'The Elements of Socialism'.² The lecture programme continued throughout the Summer of 1909, but at new premises, the ILP rooms at Clarendon Terrace. The programme included a lecture by Kavanagh on 12th September 1909 on 'William Morris' and Beavan's lecture on the 26th 'The spirit of unrest'.³ In the Autumn many of the pupils became involved in the campaign to support their jailed mentor, Ferrer, sending their protest to the Spanish embassy.⁴ On 17th October, after Ferrer's execution, the children decided to change the school's name to the International Modern School. A pamphlet was also published entitled The Martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer.⁵

During 1910 the school began to change, instead of there just being a programme of lectures, the school began to develop a more systematic approach. After visiting a local Socialist Sunday school, Dick decided to adopt their Froebelian method of teaching according to age and stage.⁶ Froebel was the pioneer of kindergarten education. His ideas

¹ Freedom, V. 23, n. 238, Feb. 1909, p. 16.

² 'An Englishman's Home' was an imperialist play then showing in Liverpool. Fairbrother 'pointed out the true condition of the Englishmen's home and finished with a plea for the solidarity of the workers of all nations'. Ibid., V. 23, n. 241, May, 1909, p. 39.

³ Ibid., V. 23, n. 247, Nov. 1909, p. 87.

⁴ Ibid., V. 23, n. 246, Oct. 1909, p. 79.

⁵ The pamphlet was issued in conjunction with the local Anarchists at the International club. See Ibid., V. 23, n. 247, Nov. 1909, p. 87.

⁶ At this time many of the Socialist Sunday Schools were utilising Froebel's ideas. See C. Steedman, Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860-1931. (Virago Press, London, 1990), pp. 176-7.

on the development of individual character and the removal of restraints upon growth harmonised well with libertarian educational theory. Agnes Henry for example, believed that kindergarten theory was 'essentially anarchist in method and principles'.¹ Froebel believed that the child was an organism and education was the development of that organism. This development was spontaneous, Froebel called it 'self-activity'. He insisted that observation must be combined with free expression. Thus the educators role was not to interfere and prescribe, but to oversee and protect. The child's natural activity expressed itself in play. The school's function was to encourage this natural development.

By the Summer of 1910 there were several classes in operation. Kavanagh ran a class for children under seven years of age in which he utilised kindergarten theory, encouraging the children to play freely and express themselves. Dick had responsibility for a class of older children. In response to demand his classes focused on the theory of evolution, which he compared with creation theory. This was a popular class, partly because of the informal discussions which took place. Finally, there was an adult class which focused on numeracy skills and language teaching.² The winter of 1910-11 brought disaster however. With the numbers rising and the lectures and discussions becoming ever more diverse, and under increasing influence from the children, the aftermath of the Sidney Street siege took its toll. For the last two weeks of December 1910 the papers were full of nothing else. Under the headline 'Liverpool and the Anarchists - Is there a centre in the city?' the Daily Post and Mercury declared: 'In the provinces the most active centre is Liverpool. In some places anarchist schools have been opened where the children are practised in revolutionary songs and brought up in the ways of violence'.³

¹ Hamon, Psychologie de l' Anarchiste-socialiste, pp. 224

² Freedom, V. 24, n. 251, March. 1910, p. 24. Earlier on, in January. Kavanagh had addressed the children on 'War'. After his talk he presented each of the children with copies of Holarek's War Pictures.

³ Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 5. Jan. 1911, p. 7.

The school now became the subject of speculation in the media. The Fortnightly Review warned of the dangers of this pioneering school. Dick took some satisfaction from this:

We have it on the authority of the Fortnightly Review that our school is the pioneer. This is news to me. "If the schools do not increase in England", it says. "it will not be for the want of zeal on the part of the English anarchists". It is well comrades, that we have the "zeal" to do things....To increase these schools.....would certainly be a great factor in realising that international solidarity for which we are striving.¹

However, the ILP were not altogether pleased at the publicity which the school had attracted and the effect that this might have on its reputation. As a result the school was evicted from the ILP buildings on the grounds that the children were a disruptive influence.²

The school found a new home at Alexander Mall, Islington Square, and reopened on 26th February. Within three months however, it became clear that the school would have to close because the children could not travel easily to the new buildings.³ In 1912 Dick left for Oxford where he attended Ruskin College. This was not the end however. Under the guidance of Matt Roche the school re-opened on 12th October 1913 at the Communist Club in Islington Road. The following Sunday a series of discussions on trade unionism was started and workers from the docks came to speak to the children. The lectures by workers reflected the need for the children to receive an education that was connected to real life and not overly focused on theory. In the Anarchist schools children were taken out into the working environment and workers were encouraged to come into the school.⁴ Whilst the Liverpool school did not pioneer any radical teaching methods, Dick's writings and activities display a fundamental respect for the dignity and independence of young people. He strove to establish a form of education that believed in the right of young people to make up their own minds about all issues.

¹ Freedom, V. 25, n. 264, April, 1911, p. 31.

² Ibid., V. 25, n. 262, Feb., 1911, p. 15.

³ Ibid., V. 25, n. 265, May, 1911, p. 40.

⁴ Ibid., V. 27, n. 295, Nov. 1913, p. 91.

The Ferrer School which opened at New King's Hall at 135 Commercial Road East, London on 23rd June 1912 was an offshoot from the Jubilee Street School. Why this occurred is not clear, but it may have been due to lack of space. When the school opened sixty children attended. It is likely that the Jubilee Street club could not accommodate such numbers, especially as it was used by so many other people. Kavanagh opened the school and a speaker from the Central Labour College, A. J. Cook, of the South Wales Miners, gave an address on mining. In conjunction with this a discussion of Zola's Germinal took place.¹ On September 8th Malatesta gave an address, on 'Ferrer and the Modern School Movement'.² The school grew rapidly until by the end of 1912, there were over 100 children from five to sixteen years old attending regularly. In March 1913 Ploschansky reported that the school was moving again, this time to 146 Stepney Green East. There were clearly more rooms that could be used at the new premises since a club room and a library were established and from now on the school was to be open every weekday evening.³

In 1913 Nellie met Jim Dick at a May Day rally. He was handing out anti-militarist leaflets under a banner of the Central Labour College. Nellie invited him to speak at her school and he soon became involved in its running.⁴ Sunday afternoons were mostly given over to lectures. However, children formed groups after the lectures, some by age, some by gender. Usually they wished to discuss the lecture topics, without the adults interfering, but frequently they began different discussions altogether. An adult education class was also established.⁵ In June 1913 Roche gave an address on 'Evolution' and Dai Owen of the SWMF on the coal industry. Tuesday evenings at the school were given over to reading class. Whilst the teachers usually suggested books to read, any of the children's

¹ Ibid., V. 26, n. 279, July, 1912, p. 55. Cook was also a co-author of The Miners' Next Step.

² The following week there was a visit by Bonar Thompson, who recited Wilde's The Ballad of Reading Gaol. Freedom, V. 26, n. 281, Sept. 1912, p. 72.

³ Ibid., V. 27, n. 287, March, 1913, p. 23.

⁴ P. Avrich, The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States, (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 243.

⁵ Freedom, V. 27, n. 293, Sept. 1913, p. 46.

suggestions were accepted.¹ Thursday evenings were given over to sports and dancing and the school even had a cricket team. On October 12th 1913 the children commemorated Ferrer's death and letters of greeting were read from the Liverpool school and the Modern school in Barcelona.²

As the school developed in size and organisation so too did the involvement of the children in its running.³ This was particularly evident in plans to publish a journal entitled The Modern School, aimed at 'promoting self-expression' and reporting on the schools activities. The first issue was published at the end of January 1914. The second issue in April and the third in July. It seems that none of these issues has survived, but they apparently contained articles which were written by the children. Issue three had an article entitled 'What is Anarchy?' by Willie (aged 11), two letters from children in Canada and 'Bits by the Bairns' by Henry (aged 7).⁴ It was an eight page magazine with a frontpiece showing two children holding the torch of liberty on high with a copy of Science and Truth under their arms. The picture of a priest hurrying away with Bible in hand figured in the background.⁵

With the outbreak of war, Dick reported that the school was organising lectures aimed at 'maintaining the spirit of internationalism'. To this end, Jack Tanner lectured on 'Ferrer's life as an Internationalist', reminding the children that 'in these times of carnage', Ferrer, 'as an advocate of human solidarity would have grieved over the spectacle of....today'. 'All the more need', he declared, 'for centres like our school as a protest against barbarism'.⁶ In December Dick announced that the school had moved again,

¹ Ibid., V. 27, n. 292, Aug. 1913, p. 67 and V. 27, n. 290, June. 1913, p. 51. Thanks to Charles Lahr, who donated many books from his shop, the school developed a large library.

² Ibid., V. 27, n. 295, Nov. 1913, p. 91-2. At the same meeting, Jack Tanner told of his travels abroad, particularly his tramp through France and Spain

³ Individual initiative was always encouraged. Thus, on one occasion, when Nellie Dick was away and the other teacher did not turn up, the children organised the class themselves and held a debate on 'Charity', while one of the elder girls spoke to the younger class. Freedom, V. 27, n. 287, March, 1913, p. 23.

⁴ Ibid., V. 28, n. 302, July, 1914, p. 55.

⁵ Voice of Labour, 3, July, 1914, p. 3.

⁶ Freedom, V. 28, n. 307, Nov. 1914, p. 83.

‘taking up quarters at 24 Green Street, Cambridge Road. On Tuesday evenings French lessons. Thursday evenings discussion and reading class. Sunday afternoons our usual meetings’.¹ In January 1915 Freedom reported that ‘we are requested to draw attention to the fact that only part of the school has shifted its quarters, the larger section remaining at Whitechapel Road.’² Apparently both schools benefited. A new ‘Education Group’ was established to run the school which remained at Whitechapel Road. It consisted mostly of younger children. At Green Street the older children set about developing their school on their own, with only minimal help from Jim Dick. At Whitechapel Road, Rudolf Rocker’s son, also called Rudolf, ran the school until he was interned. His half-brother, Fermin, remembers how it was free from all forms of coercion: ‘Rudolf would have no rewards or punishments. Children learned as they wanted to learn’.³

The breakaway school at 24 Green Street, Cambridge Road did not stay there too long. By March 1915 it had moved to Ashburton House in Hertford Place.⁴ Lectures still took place on Sunday, but the school was also open on most evenings during the week. The school began to publish another magazine entitled Liberty. The paper was typed and bound in a professional manner and the surviving copies offer a valuable insight into what kind of experience an alternative education offered. Issue one was published in February 1915 and contained articles on the war. There was also a piece about Futurist art by ‘Barney’. The most interesting was an article written by ‘Ruben’ entitled ‘State Schools and the Workers’. It stressed that ‘The duty of the workers is to take more interest in the education of the children in state schools. They should protest against the teaching of religion and patriotism’.⁵ In issue two there were features about evolution, conscription and a review of

¹ Ibid., V. 28, n. 308, Dec., 1914, p. 90.

² Ibid., V. 29, n. 309, Jan. 1915, p. 8.

³ Typescript of interview with Fermin Rocker by Andrew Whitehead., 27. Sept. 1985, p. 13, MSS. 1538/2 MRC, Warwick.

⁴ Freedom, V. 29, n. 311, March. 1915, p. 21.

⁵ Liberty, V. 1, n. 1, Feb. 1915, p. 5.

Zola's Germinal. There was also a report from children in Ledbury who had been engaged in a school strike:

The children played a lively part in the teachers' strike. They boycotted the strike-breaker headmistress by preventing her to open the school. When the children came into the schoolrooms they upset desks, threw inkpots, knocked down pictures etc. They have made use of direct action, which I think the grown-ups have never applied in their cause and I hope they will take a lesson from the children.¹

In late 1915 the school moved to Marsh House, an Anarchist commune in Meckleburgh Street. On October 13th this was the location for a meeting commemorating Ferrer's death.² However, the school was virtually at an end. During the winter of 1915-16 it had its share of trouble with the authorities. Nellie recalled:

Once we had a party which was raided by the police - there was a spy in our group - who arrested everybody without a registration card. Also a Conservative paper, John Bull I believe, had an article about our school which said Jim was related to Lenin and I to Trotsky and that we were teaching the children to make revolution and manufacture bombs.³

In 1916 Jim and Nellie were legally married so that Jim could avoid conscription, and when married men became eligible for the draft they decided to go to the USA. With their departure the East London Modern School ended.⁴

¹ Ibid., V. 1, n. 2, March. 1915, p. 6. The children had struck in support of the Herefordshire NUT demand for salary increases. The children's resistance began at the start of February 1914, when, in response to the union's strategy of mass resignations, the local education authority appointed new teachers, many of them unqualified, to replace those involved in the dispute. Pupils throughout the county expressed sympathy for their former teachers, who were among the lowest paid in the country, by refusing to be taught by the new members of staff, and seventy schools were forced to close. The most violent scenes occurred at Ledbury Girls' School, where a riot developed in which desks were overturned, and the new headmistress was chased off the premises by a crowd of girls chanting 'Blackleg'. For an account of this strike see Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels?, p. 111. For school strikes generally see D. Marson, Children's Strikes in 1911, (Oxford, 1973).

² Among the speakers were Millie Witcop, Bessie Ward, Bonar Thompson and Jim Dick. Freedom, V. 29, n. 319, Nov. 1915, p. 88.

³ Typescript of Nellie Dick talking to Andrew Whitehead, 5. Nov. 1985, p. 2-3, MSS.21 1538/4. MRC, Warwick.

⁴ Embarking in January 1917, the Dicks' first thought was to see the Ferrer school at Stelton, New York, which they had heard much about and which paralleled their own endeavours. Arriving at Stelton in March, they were met at the rail station by Fred Dunn, who had preceded them by several months in order to escape the draft. Jim and Nellie soon joined the staff and continued to teach in various modern schools in America until 1958. Avrich, Modern School Movement, p. 243.

The last of the Modern Schools opened in London at 62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel in March 1921. It was largely the initiative of C. B. Warwick, Helena Applebaum and E. Michaels who formed themselves into an organisation known as the Free Educational Group.¹ By June there were one hundred children at the school. The school declared its aim was 'to combat the anti-social environment of capitalist education as operating through the state schools'. The school intended to entertain 'such subjects that may develop the young mind towards the love of nature, beauty, self-expression and activity'. Further, the method was to attempt to: 'instruct without the use of domination'.² The school had classes in clay modelling, singing and story reading. These classes were aimed at the younger children. There were other lessons in drawing, social science, physiology, evolution and botany. There were also debating classes. It was also the intention of the school to give the children 'occasional outings where they can learn something while enjoying themselves'. To this end a visit to Kew Gardens took place.³ Lou Appleton was a pupil at the school and he remembers the delight of feeling part of a movement helping to 'fan the flames of discontent'.⁴

There is no evidence that the children were involved in decision making in the school, but they did produce The International Modern School Magazine. Copies have survived and they offer a valuable insight into the school. In number one most of the writing was creative material with articles about eclipses of the sun and a story entitled 'The Boy in Rags'.⁵ A similar range of issues was covered in issue two. There was a piece about ancient village communities, an open letter to a Ferrer School in America and short pieces about Russia. There was also a piece attacking the state schooling system.⁶ By December 1922 the school was open on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. On Tuesday

¹ Freedom, V. 35, 381, Feb. 1921, p. 14.

² Ibid., V. 35, n. 385, June. 1921, p. 32.

³ Ibid., V. 35, n. 388, Oct. 1921, p. 63.

⁴ Interview with Lou Appleton, Oct. 1987, Lib Ed. V. 2, n. 10, 1989, p. 8.

⁵ The International Modern School Magazine, V. 1, n. 2, Dec. 1921, p. 7.

⁶ Ibid., V. 1, n. 3, June. 1922, pp. 3-4.

classes were held in Esperanto and on Thursday there were play rehearsals. The Fieldgate school continued until 1928, when it was forced to close because of a lack of funds.

Pedagogic practice and adult intentions.

The Anarchist educators did not necessarily speak with one voice. Although they were all theoretically bound by a belief in the autonomy of the individual to control the learning process, at times this goal was not always adhered to. Indeed, insofar as the schools preached specific social values, their pupils were subjected to some form of indoctrination. Dick maintained that the Liverpool school had been organised to 'teach a child to think and act for itself. To point out to them that humility, patience and submission are no longer virtues; and that they must own themselves'.¹ The Anarchist educators sought to achieve these goals through engagement in political activity, through participation in the running of the school and through the liberationary ideology which should pervade everything that went on in the school.²

In Anarchist schools children were educated to believe in liberty, equality and social justice. They were imbued with the ideals of brotherhood and co-operation and with a sympathy for the oppressed. They were taught that war was a crime against humanity, that the capitalist system was evil, that government was slavery and that freedom was essential for human development.³ Lessons were illustrated with examples of patriotism, superstition and exploitation and the suffering they produced. Ferrer believed that:

the distinction between justice and injustice is perhaps the first moral distinction which a child can and does grasp and it would be ridiculous to pretend it lies outside the proper sphere of education. Our intrinsic plea that it is not fair to prejudice the mind of a child on subjects he cannot fully understand is nothing but a fallacy of bourgeois self-defence.⁴

¹ *Freedom*, V. 23, n. 241, May, 1909, p. 39. 'Moral' education had always been a goal of libertarian pedagogy. As Bakunin had written: 'The essence of all moral education is this: inculcate children with respect for humanity, reason, truth and justice'. S. Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchy*, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1973), pp. 94-5.

² Ferrer, *The Origins and Ideals of the Modern School*, p. 52.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴ Archer, *The Life, Trial and Death of Francisco Ferrer*, p. 48.

Freedom agreed, addressing the whole question of teachers and teaching: 'At no point in his work can the teacher remain neutral; that is without conviction, without assent. However hard the truth may seem to established powers, this is only the right of the child'.¹

What Freedom did not come to grips with however, was the idea, accepted by Tolstoyans for example, that any form of indoctrination was wrong since it hinted at dogmatism. Should not distrust of the imposition of values extend to the imposition of libertarian values? There was a danger that new dogmas, justified by being credited with such attributes as modernity and naturalness, would replace the old ones. Some Anarchists thus argued 'that on general grounds of universal expediency and experience, no human has a right to force knowledge down another's throat'.² There was therefore some controversy about the politicised nature of the subject matter at some of the schools. Dick, though, defended this teaching, not out of a desire to build a vanguard of politically conscious children, but because he believed the young had a right to learn about politics, notwithstanding their ability to make up their own minds about what they thought.³

Pedagogy was also an area in which Anarchists differed. An extreme Tolstoyan definition of freedom with respect to teaching, as embraced by Louise Michel, implied absolutely no compulsion in the teaching pattern. Others disagreed with this approach. Although he strongly argued for the capacity and ability of young people to organise their own lives, Dick's approach to pedagogy was more conventional. He believed that content was what mattered most in learning, and viewed lectures as the most effective medium of instruction. This view was hardly compatible with Ferrer's principles and places Dick more in the traditions of Socialist Sunday school teaching than within the libertarian approach. Indeed, when he was invited by the Socialist Sunday School Union of Liverpool to attend a conference in July 1911 he expressed his full support for that movement. His

¹ Freedom, V. 22, n. 232, Aug. 1908, p. 52.

² C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 22. Nov. 1886, Pearson Papers, Manuscript Room, University College London.

³ Freedom, V. 23, n. 241, May, 1909, p. 39

only criticism of Socialist education was of its 'Sunday School morality' and 'quasi-religious' content, not of its more structured and formal nature than libertarian education.¹

In contrast, Louise Michel or Tolstoy would have insisted on the child's absolute freedom to decide on what was learnt, to determine the pattern of his or her day, to initiate or omit activities in whatever form they chose. There was thus a debate as to the degree to which self-motivation was essential to the learning act.²

If some Anarchists did not always have faith in the ability of children to control the learning process, others seem to have been convinced that only through coercion could the young learn. Charlotte Wilson's educational theories, for example, allowed for order as well as freedom. She emphasised the need for moral training, 'starting with the necessary absolute authority' and proceeding 'with the gradual removal of restraints and by the inculcation of personal dignity and respectability in order to form free men and women filled with reverence and love for the freedom of their fellows'.³ While most Anarchists would share her desire for 'free men and women' they would not see such authoritarian methods as the way to make them. Indeed, in Wilson's endorsement of 'the rod in the nursery', a tendency to advocate force on a selective, not entirely consistent basis appears. She explained: 'Children are not reasonable beings and must be trained up to perfect liberty, by the gradual removal of restraint....I have beheld an infant Anarchist corrected

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 25, n. 268, Aug. 1911, p. 63.

² This distinction between absolute freedom and some form of guidance was best demonstrated in the differences between Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana and the Modern School of Ferrer. The former allowed the children such freedom that one commentator accused him of being a 'pedagogical nihilist'. For a discussion of this distinction see F. Tayer, 'Politics and Culture in Anarchist Education: The Modern School of New York and Stelton 1911-15', in *Curriculum Inquiry*, V. 16, n.4, 1986. At Yasnaya Polyana pupils sat where they pleased and came and went without restraint. Attendance was optional. A class was adjourned when the pupils lost interest in it, and if they did not feel like working, nobody forced them. There were no written assignments to prepare in advance, no report cards, no exams. 'I am convinced', said Tolstoy, 'that the school has no right and ought not to reward or punish; that the best police and administration of a school consists in giving full liberty to the pupils to study and settle their disputes as they know best'. Tolstoy, *Tolstoy on Education*, pp. 231-37.

³ *Justice*, 6. Dec. 1884.

with a resounding slap by its fond and enlightened parent, for talking unreasonably in the presence of its elders'.¹

On the whole, however, such views were rare. Educators like Robin, for example, took up a liberal position whose characteristic features were avoidance of corporal punishment, the imposition instead of social penalties, often communally arrived at, and a general sensitive reluctance to breach the child's self-respect and dignity. Most British Anarchist educators took this line. Punishments were rejected, as was the process of distributing rewards or prizes to selected pupils, since this led to 'vanity and venality'.² The Anarchist educators thus made an effort to address the whole issue of pedagogy, discussing new techniques such as those of Maria Montessori:

this system...has practical results that the old authoritarian child de-formers would scout as impossible. The object is not to teach the child certain set subjects, but to develop its bodily senses and powers of observation and reasoning, so that it can teach itself in accordance with the prompting of its nature. The children in school are free to talk, sit where they like, work or watch others working, just as they choose....the teacher is not there to coerce, but to stimulate with ever-ready sympathy.

Freedom believed this approach was based on 'Anarchist first principles'.³ In February 1910 it began a column specifically aimed at young people and carried articles castigating parents and teachers for their abuse of children.⁴ In their journalism the Anarchists called on adults to try to gain some sort of insight into youthful emotions and to sympathise with them and argued strongly that an absence of coercion was essential for the full achievement of youth's autonomy.⁵

The Anarchist educators also sought to foster a free consciousness amongst the young by encouraging their participation in the management and decision making process

¹ C. Wilson to G. B. Shaw, 10. Dec. 1884, ff. 310-314, AM 50510, Shaw Papers, British Library, London. Although Wilson occasionally helped out at Louise Michel's school, given her belief in disciplining infant Anarchists until they were fit for freedom, she may have had her doubts about its non-coercive approach.

² Freedom, V. 11, n. 119, Sept. 1897, p. 63.

³ Ibid., V. 26, n. 284, Dec. 1912, p. 91.

⁴ Ibid., V. 24, March. 1910.

⁵ Ibid., V. 27, n. 287, Feb. 1913, p. 16.

of the schools. The issue over decision-making at the Ferrer School on Commercial Road became the subject of intense debate at the end of 1914. In December part of the International Modern School moved to 24 Green Street, Cambridge Road East, whilst the larger section remained at Whitechapel Road. In January 1915 Dick explained that the school had divided into two parts and that while ‘no enmity’ existed with the old school, the teenagers felt it was in ‘the best interests of free development to rely upon their own initiative’.¹ Nellie Ploschansky recalled that it was the older boys who wanted to leave. She and Jim decided to leave with them, and Rudolf Rocker’s son, Rudolf, remained to continue with the other children. Dick wrote of the split under the title ‘The School Children’s Revolt’:

Realising their true position as Modern School children, this rebel part objects to the domination of elders, and like true Anarchists....they have given a valuable lesson to their elders. “We will not submit to what we consider to be an intolerable position”, they say, and straightaway, without reference to rules, regulations or precedent, they proceeded to find a meeting-place wherein they could run a school themselves.²

This was a strong libertarian polemic and the ‘rump’ felt obliged to reply. Rocker saw the issue differently:

It would appear that there is a section of children which is content to be “dominated” by its elders. We desire to protest against these misrepresentations....[A] month ago....the senior children, after discussion between themselves came to the conclusion that the school would prosper better if they themselves were concerned in the general management. On this point we agreed. The division came because a part of the scholars (mainly the older boys) thought that the improvement could only be attained by a complete severing.....whereas we (the older girls and younger children) were of the opinion that the remedy was to be sought in co-operation between the adults and children.³

The split shows that the schools were not always perfect outposts of harmony. However, that the controversy between the students of the Modern school was over such an important

¹ *Ibid.*, V, 29, n. 309, Jan. 1915, p. 8.

² *Voice of Labour*, Dec. 1914, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1915, p. 4.

issue as decision making demonstrates the extent to which many of the pupils and teachers were committed to empowering the young.

As was stressed earlier, Dick and his comrades saw their schools not only as educational institutions, but as a centres of agitation, a training ground for revolutionary activity. Basic to their philosophy was the belief that education should develop individuals who were equipped to build an Anarchist society. This meant that the children at the schools were encouraged to participate in direct agitational activity outside their classrooms. Ploschansky for example, discussed how the Jubilee Street school politicised children and legitimised their hostility to the state schools:

For instance when I took some children to a 1st May demonstration, one time it happened to be on a day when they should have been in public school. I told them that if the teacher asked why they were away they were to tell them why they were not at school. They did. They were punished....but they said "we went because it was a workers' holiday and my father is a worker, so there".¹

Sometimes children used the discussion groups within the schools to organise their own activity. Ploschansky recalled that the boys at the Stepney Green school held a meeting and decided that they would organise protection for the Suffragettes: 'Our boys would go out and make a circle around them and defend them from the police and the people who would try and disturb the campaigning'.² Similarly, Dick reported that a discussion had taken place at one of these meetings to strike against the saluting of the flag in state school on Empire Day. The children decided at first not to attend school, but many felt it cowardly not to face the issue head on. The children went to school and openly refused to salute the flag, thus making 'their protest against this fostering of hatred of other countries'.³ This anti-nationalist sentiment was to develop further after the passing of the

¹ Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in *Lib Ed.* V. 2, n. 7, 1988, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*,

³ *Freedom*, V. 27, n. 290, June, 1913, p. 51. Prior to this on Empire Day in May 1909 the children from the Liverpool school had distributed leaflets 'as an antidote to the patriotic bombast that the day schools were giving'. *Ibid.*, V. 23, n. 242, June, 1909, p. 47.

Military Service Act in 1916. Many of the boys at the Green Street school became involved in distributing anti-conscription leaflets. Nellie remembered:

our boys were sometimes yanked up to the tribunal because they were tall and they looked older. And once one of the boys was called up and he said that he belonged to this Sunday School, and he didn't think he had any fighting to do with the workers in Germany. And they said to him "How old are the children who attend that school? How young do you take them?" He says, "As soon as they are able to think". It was very tough on those youngsters because mothers whose sons were going to war, would pin white feathers on them. They didn't know how old they were.¹

Political activity such as this helped train the next generation of militants. The schools were therefore the nearest thing to a youth section that the Anarchists ever had. The training of future activists was clearly a major, if non-emphasised, part of the adult agenda.

Some of the adult educators also seem to have had another ulterior motive in mind, namely in seeking refreshment in the presumed childlike innocence and thirst for knowledge of the young. This is evident in Dick's description of a trip to Shiplake-on-Thames by the Commercial Road school:

What a glorious time we had. And what children we all are when we are freely communing with nature. All thoughts of private property - if we have any - are left behind and the law and order of the old fogies passes away like a bad dream. Our revels are so free that the musts and must not of which I for one am heartily sick, have no meaning in our joyous but too brief experience of an unchained existence. Let them call us savages if they will. We will accept the name....our fathers and mothers who have been good too long must learn that the time is fast ripening when the "bad uns" will play the devil with the suppressers of merriment.²

Rather than describing the actual experience of the children on the trip, Dick's account demonstrates something about the adult Anarchist frame of mind. In many ways it seems as though the adults experienced an almost euphoric refreshment, a recapturing of a lost youth. Indeed, it could be argued that the Anarchist view of humanity in general is nothing more than a cult of childlike innocence. Amongst the young and 'uncorrupted' the adult

¹ Interview with Nellie Dick, Miami, Florida, Sept. 1986, cited in Lib Ed, V. 2, n. 7, 1988, p. 6.

² Freedom, V. 27, n. 292, Aug. 1913, p. 67.

Anarchist could be refreshed and rejuvenated after experiencing a glimpse of the ideal society, or as Dick put it a 'joyous experience of an unchained existence'.

Carolyn Steedman has demonstrated how early twentieth century adult beliefs and desires were often expressed in the figure of a child and the experience of an idealised childhood. This view of childhood and its history, like Dick's account of the school trip, had much less to do with actual children than with adult concepts of the self. The fin de siècle saw a search for the self, for a past that was lost. This lost essence or vision came to assume the shape and form of the child.¹ Steedman writes: 'the child-figure came to be used as an extension of the self, a resource for returning to one's own childhood, and as an image of one's extension in time'.² During our period a change took place in the way that people understood themselves and a new conception of what self was occurred. The idea that the core of an individual's psychic identity was their own childhood began to gain credibility. At the same time, childhood acquired a new significance. As Dick's comments show, children became symbols of hope, of a better future and of individuality.

The experience of the children.

So far we have discussed the schools from the perspective of the adult teachers. What were the schools like for the pupils? On the whole the children seem to have enjoyed their schooling. Despite the question as to whether or not the Anarchists sought to indoctrinate the children in their care, the children seem to have believed they were free to pick and choose their ideas.³ Lou Appleton remembered the Fieldgate school as a rich cultural experience, where it was possible to learn in an atmosphere that was not constrained by rules, and where the teachers sought to offer a broad range of subjects.⁴ In

¹ See C. Steedman, Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930, (Virago, London, 1995).

² Steedman, Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain, p. 64.

³ One of the pupils at the Jubilee Street school, Leah Feldman, recalled that the children were free to reject the views of their teachers if they so wished. They were encouraged to think for themselves. See Typescript Interview of Leah Feldman talking to Andrew Whitehead, 7. Oct. 1985, p. 10. MSS 21/1538/3, MRC. Warwick.

⁴ Interview with Lou Appleton, Oct. 1987, Lib Ed, V. 2, n. 10, 1989, p. 8.

The International Modern School Magazine there was a revealing piece by one of the pupils entitled 'Why I attend the Modern School':

I am compelled by law to attend an elementary school which is not to my liking. We find the discipline of the elementary schools very strict. It is not so in the Modern School. Our discipline is self-respect, that is we do not run about like hooligans knowing that the teachers can do us no harm. By doing no harm I mean that they do not cane us. Some of the subjects taught in the Modern School are: clay modelling, astronomy, natural sciences and drawing. In the council schools we are taught to be patriotic, but in the Modern School, we are taught to be lovers of freedom.¹

In an article in Liberty a girl called 'Lilly' also explained her reasons for liking libertarian schooling:

Before I went to the Modern School I had friends from the day school and they were very religious and as my parents were not so I could not make out which were right, my parents or my religious friends. At home we never keep up holidays (holydays) but my friends always did so I felt very uncomfortable. Now I go to the Modern School and my friends are just the same as I am. I feel much nicer because I see more children whose parents are like mine.²

Although Lilly clearly enjoyed her experiences at the school, her statement raises an important issue, namely to what extent the schools served only to withdraw children into an Anarchist ghetto, protecting them from having to negotiate with the wider world. It could be argued that a true education should involve the experiencing of a variety of situations and perspectives, no matter how unsavoury, which would allow children to develop into human beings prepared for the real world, not just a small sectarian milieu where everybody thought the same way.

The Anarchists were perfectly aware of the aspects of the state system that they did not like, and they proved quite capable of organising and funding their own schools. These schools reveal a considerable amount about British Anarchism. The political

¹ The International Modern School Magazine, V. 1, n. 2, Dec. 1921, p. 7. Humphries' work demonstrates that many children viewed their schooling as a boring and authoritarian imposition with little relevance. The experience of schooling as a monotonous and pointless chore meant that for many pupils, attainment of the school leaving age and entry into the world of work was celebrated as a moment of liberation. This tends to support the view that Anarchist attitudes to state education may not have been entirely out of line with those of many working-class children. See Humphries, Hooligans or Rebels?, pp. 54-61.

² Liberty, V. 1, n. 2, March, 1915, p. 6.

orientation of the schools did not develop as an isolated experiment in radical teaching, but were deeply rooted in working-class politics. Most of them largely recruited from among a sympathetic milieu in communities where Anarcho-syndicalist ideas and activities were much in evidence.¹ As was stressed earlier, Jim Dick and his comrades saw their schools not only as educational institutions, but as a centres of propaganda and agitation, a training ground for revolutionary activity. The school, in other words, was at once an instrument of self-development and a lever of social regeneration. In the meantime, the schools would serve as a libertarian alternatives to the existing regime, embryos of the coming millennium, enclaves of freedom within the larger authoritarian society, providing a model for others to emulate. In effect the Anarchist educationalists were applying the principle of Syndicalism to educational practice, with the school, the counterpart of the union, acting as a vehicle of social transformation.

An examination of the schools indicates a strong belief in direct action as a justifiable and liberating form of political activity. The active support for the Suffragettes, the refusal to submit to flag saluting on Empire Days and the leafleting against conscription, all illustrate that the schools were not just places of study, but that they were part of the Anarchist milieu. As far as practice is concerned, the schools had their own individual characteristics, but there were many common threads. In the first place the schools expressed a fundamental belief in the autonomy of the individual. They sought to develop an approach to learning and teaching that was individualised, insofar as children were encouraged always to think for themselves in the way they desired. There was no

¹ The schools also drew support from those sympathetic to the Central Labour College and Plebs League. This was evident in the 1905 establishment of the Université Populaire de Londres, which met in Euston. It was modelled 'on the lines of the People's Institutes which in France...have done so much for the higher education of the working class'. Handbill for Université Populaire de Londres, 1905, List 311, NC, IISH. Many Anarchists involved in trade union militancy reinforced the links between Anarcho-syndicalism and education through their work in adult learning at the Jubilee Street Club. Workers' education of this kind remained a significant feature of educational endeavour in our period. See G. Fiddler, 'Labour Conflicts in British Workers' Education in the early twentieth century: A local Perspective', in *Pedagogica Historica*, V. 24, n. 1, 1984, pp. 51-82.

requirements that children should follow a particular programme of study. The range of subjects that were offered in the schools enabled children to make real choices about what they wanted to study. Children were able to exercise control over what they studied and for how long. In some schools they were also involved in the management and decision making process, although it would be misleading to exaggerate this.

The schools held a set of beliefs that sought to break down the boundaries between pupils and teachers, that was grounded in a desire to construct non-coercive pedagogies, and that was not concerned with a system of reward and punishment. This was a reaction to the treatment of children in state schools and an expression of belief in the dignity of youth. The schools seemed to have been happy places, there was no compulsory attendance and yet in all the schools there was a demand for them to be open as often as possible. Taken as a whole, the Anarchist schools constitute a coherent and active critique of the national education system. They were amongst the first initiatives in Britain which sought to place the child, and nobody else, at the forefront of the theory and practice of education. The schools apportioned to learners a degree of independence and autonomy that Anarchists sought for everybody.

The schools were funded and run by Anarchists and mainly attended by the children of Anarchists, rather than working-class children generally. There is little evidence to suggest that children who were not brought up within the Anarchist milieu attended the schools. The schools' significance therefore lies in more what they said, believed and represented, than in what they did. They failed to have more impact than they did because of their self-isolation. Although they were part of a broader educational current, there is little evidence to suggest that they looked to link up with other progressive initiatives. Admittedly they were community projects, and served the immediate interests and concerns of their respective communities, but the Anarchists had a vision of education that they wished to see develop across society. The mistake is that they did not take their message

outside the confines of their own communities. This tendency to self-isolation was a characteristic feature of Anarchism. While an examination of the libertarian schools reveals that some working-class radicals had a vision of the type of school they wished to see, the children being taught in such schools were clearly a drop in the ocean in terms of numbers. Despite the seriousness with which the issues were thought through and acted upon by Anarchists, and despite the existence of a potential audience for such thinking within the tradition of independent working-class schooling, there is little evidence to suggest that they had any influence outside their own ghetto.

Yet the Anarchists were not alone in criticising state education. As we have seen, many of their concerns were shared by educationalists within the Socialist Sunday School movement.¹ Reformers like Margaret McMillan were certainly interested in new child centred approaches to learning and could have been useful allies. The Anarchists' sectarianism however prevented them from linking up with these progressive elements. The Anarchist education reformers could also have had more of an influence if they had accepted the possibility of gaining recognition for their schools from the state. A later series of private libertarian initiatives were recognised by the government and became well known throughout the world. The work of A. S. Neil at Summerhill for example, had a great influence on a series of other initiatives which emerged after the 1920's.² These experiments had a far greater impact than the earlier Anarchist interventions.³ Nevertheless, while it is true that their goals were not fully realised because of their isolation, in terms of the development of an alternative method of education that repudiated dogma and repression, the Anarchist schools were a success.

¹ Simon, Education and the Labour Movement, pp. 146-7.

² For an account of the Summerhill school see J. Croall, Neil of Summerhill: The Permanent Rebel. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984).

³ There is little evidence to suggest that the Anarchist educators or their state recognised cousins sought to link up with one another. The only exceptions to this that I have found are two letters from A. S. Neil to Jim Dick, written in 1931, inviting him and Nellie to visit Summerhill. Neil was clearly aware of the Dick's educational activity in America at this time, but there is no suggestion that he knew of their earlier British initiatives. See A. S. Neil to J. Dick, 11. April and 30 June, 1931, cited in Avrich, Modern School Movement, p. 315.

Chapter Four. Castles in the air? Anarchism and Alternative Communities.

The lesson learnt from the years of propaganda throughout the 1880's was that the road leading to an Anarchist society would be a long and difficult one. This awareness gave rise to attempts to pioneer the social revolution by experimenting with communal lifestyles, a tendency which embodied the conviction that a person could attain complete self-reliance through their own efforts while simultaneously sowing the seeds of change. At the basis of such a view lay a gradualist view of progress which conceived the new order as arising slowly out of the present, rather than following upon the breakdown of capitalism.

From the beginning of the 19th century Socialists had dreamed of breaking away from conventional society in order to form new communities.¹ In the 1890's the Anarchists moved to the centre of this tradition. Such utopian enterprises represented an attempt to place the relationships of work and living on a basis which differed from the norm that had existed since the Industrial Revolution. Their makers attempted to realise in a concrete way ahead of time the conditions they desired or expected in society as a whole.² The Anarchist communalists attempted to achieve communism in property, co-operation in production and an indefinable quality of freedom with mutual aid in personal relationships. Like their predecessors the Anarchists failed to transform society, yet they made progress in specific

¹ The most prominent communalists in Britain were the Owenite Socialists, whose communes reflected both an abstract concern to realise a harmonious society based on small, local, voluntary associations, and a practical experience of co-operatives as a model for economic organisation. In the 1870's, other groups of communalists emerged from the back to the land movement. John Ruskin founded St. George's farm at Abbeydale, for industrial workers to avoid the ills of industrialism. This romantic dream of a pastoral utopia soon met up with growing worries about unemployment, and, in the 1880's, a number of Ruskin's followers formed the English Land Colonisation Society to resettle unemployed workers in self-sufficient agrarian communes. See R. G. Garnett, Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain 1825-1845, (Manchester University Press, 1972), D. Hardy, Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England, (Longman, London, 1979), J. Marsh, Back to the Land, (London, 1982), and P. Gould, Early Green Politics, Back to Nature, Back to the Land and Socialism in Britain 1880-1900, (Harvester Press, Brighton, Sussex, 1988).

² The Anarchist experiments clearly belong to this utopian tradition in that they encapsulated what Kumar sees as the utopian hope of what the future could possibly be like and the dystopian (or anti-utopian) fear of what the future may hold if people did not act to avert catastrophe. This dual emphasis was a guiding influence on many of the communities. See K. Kumar, Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1987).

fields. To varying degrees they offered alternative ideas on the relative roles of men and women, on the balance and integration of work and leisure and on modes of dress.

The Anarchist communes represented the efforts of people who were agreed on the nature of an alternative society, and on the efficacy of the community as a method of achieving it. Communities can therefore be seen as a method of social change. Yet they can also be seen as an end in themselves, becoming little more than 'miniature utopias [with] no great influence on the mass of the people'.¹ In other words, were the communes outside the main currents of radical thought and action, or were they tactical variations in a wider struggle? Despite taking into account the communalists' achievements, the following will argue that the former description is more accurate.

Socialism and Communal experiments.

There had always been doubts amongst Socialists as to whether or not the establishment of communities was the best way forward, even though they represented no real challenge to the established forms of Socialist struggle. There was a feeling that communities could distract support from more urgent activities. It was Marx who had developed the case against communitarianism. He argued that such schemes were 'utopian' since they were presented before the true nature of the emerging class war could be seen.

All they were based upon was the inventiveness of their designers:

Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the practical carrying out of their social plans....they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary, action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour, by small experiments, necessary doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel.

What was seen to be more inhibiting to change was that the critical impulse that was evident amongst the communities had already been overtaken by historical events:

In proportion as the class struggle develops and takes definite shape, this fantastic standing apart from the contest, these fantastic attacks on it, lose all practical value and all theoretical justification. Therefore, although the originators of these systems were, in many respects, revolutionary, their disciples have, in every case, formed reactionary sects.....They still dream

¹ The Industrialist, V. 1, n. 3, Aug. 1908, p. 3.

of experimental realisation of their social utopias....and to realise these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeoisie.¹

Even amongst the Anarchists there were those who were not prepared to support the establishment of communities before a revolution. Elisée Reclus argued that communities were counter-revolutionary since they benefited only a few and left the existing order intact. Even if communitarian experiments were successful, he argued in 1884, even 'if man enjoyed in them the highest happiness', they would none the less, be 'obnoxious' in their 'selfish isolation'. To Reclus the ideal of a colony was totally alien: 'As for us', never will we separate ourselves from the world....Here is the fighting ground, and we remain in the ranks'. Those who were attracted to the idea of some paradise, said Reclus, were suffering from the illusion that the Anarchists constituted a 'party' outside society. That was not true. 'Our joy, our passion, is in putting into practice that which seems egalitarian and just to us, not only with regard to our comrades, but also with regard to all men....In our plan of existence and struggle, it is not the small chapel of comrades which interests us; it is the entire world'. Anarchists were, therefore, obliged to remain in the 'civilised world' and to continue their propaganda. Their enemies understood this very well, said Reclus. They were already saying that it would be very useful if all Anarchists fled to some utopia.²

Many Socialists were thus hostile to the communal enclaves within the movement, seeing them as a 'withdrawal from the fray'.³ It was also true that by the turn of the

¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto' (1848), cited in Kumar, Utopia and Anti-Utopia, p. 52. Marx's rival within the International, Michael Bakunin, agreed. It was his assessment that efforts to change society by means of the example of peaceful associations were naive. He dismissed colonies as 'magnanimous and noble, but scarcely realisable. Even if they do succeed somewhere it will be a drop in the ocean....Let them try it if they see no alternative, but at the same time let them recognise that this is much too little to liberate our martyred people. The other path is the militant one of insurrection'. M. Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy, ed.: M. S. Shatz, (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 178-9.

² E. Reclus, 'An Anarchist on Anarchy', Contemporary Review, May. 1884. The article was also reprinted in Liberty, V. 1, n. 3, March. 1894. For a similar view see Commonweal, V. 7, n. 266, 6. June. 1891, p. 55.

³ The Clarion, 22. Feb. 1896. For the SDF's attacks on colony schemes for taking workers out of the industrial and political struggle see Justice, 2. Nov. 1897.

century, a lot of Socialist opinion was running against utopian sentiments more generally. This was admitted by A. M. Thompson when he wrote that whilst Morris's News From Nowhere had dwarfed Looking Backward from a 'human' point of view, Bellamy's system of state communism had a wider effect. It had appealed powerfully to the 'practical', 'hard-headed' mass.¹ Indeed, Sidney Webb recommended that Socialists accept the factory system and the complexity of modern civilisation, in the process ridding themselves of 'those projects of bygone Socialisms'.²

Nevertheless, there were those who insisted that the establishment of communities was not a retreat from the struggle. One of the few positive reports came in the Labour Annual of 1900:

The reformers' army can well spare a few...for this arduous task. At worst, the development of character which always results to those who boldly take their welfare in their hands, and go out to seek new forms of life...is a gain. To us who do not follow their path, their example may be a stimulus to the work we have chosen.³

The individuals who supported communal experiments were from that part of the Socialist movement which desired a return to a simpler and more ethical way of life in harmony with nature. Back to nature and back to the land ideas featured prominently in Socialist literature. Well known thinkers like Tolstoy, Carpenter and Morris articulated yearnings that were shared by many. Dissatisfaction with urban industrial society and sympathy for things rural and natural was very popular. The idea of living in harmony with, and as part of nature, made people look favourably on the creation of small, self-sufficient and self-governing communities.⁴

¹ Gould, Early Green Politics, p. 132.

² S. Webb, Socialism: True and False, (London, 1899), p. 10.

³ The Labour Annual: A Year Book of Social, Economic and Political Reform for 1900, (London, 1899), p. 117. An editorial in the Commonweal adopted a similar attitude, arguing that although community experiments were 'isolated amid the ocean of commercialism', they were nevertheless 'outposts pushed forward into the enemies country by the advancing army of the revolution'. Commonweal, V. 2, n. 45, 20. Nov. 1886, p. 266.

⁴ Gould, Early Green Politics, p ix.

The supporters of such ideas also sought to combine the social and environmental advantages of rural life with the economic advantages of urban life. They wanted to break down the barriers between town and country. The abolition of the town and country antagonism would be 'one of the first conditions of communal life'.¹ Many writers made the case for a return to small communities in the countryside. Anthropological and historical arguments were advanced to support the case that a return to earlier social forms based on the village was natural and desirable.² Freedom claimed that 'To the Anarchist, who desires the freedom of the human race not merely from authority, but also from bad surroundings, there can be no cry more fascinating as "Back to the Land"'. A massive population distribution in which the attractions of work divided between factory and field would be realised, was predicted. The people would once again be 'scattered over the length and breadth of the land, and living not as factory hands, but as men and women, spending.....part of their time in the factory and part in the fields; but no longer divorced from the soil which gives them the means of life'.³ Freedom predicted that when the change came 'all the objectionable conglomerations of humanity which we call cities will have disappeared'.⁴

Ideas about town and country integration and the 'simple life' in harmony with nature were something that permeated much of the Socialist movement. A good example

¹ K. Marx and F. Engels: Selected Writings, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968), p. 65.

² See for example, W. Morris, News From Nowhere, (Longmans, Green and co, London, 1907), especially Ch. 10, J. Morrison Davidson, Annals of Toil, (London, 1899), pp. 475, 274. P. Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution, (1902, Harmondsworth, Penguin, London, 1939), pp. 41, 57, The Clarion, 27. August 1898, and J. Morrison Davidson's article in Reynold's News, 30. Jan. 1910.

³ Freedom, V. 5, n. 58, Sept. 1891, p. 72.

⁴ Ibid., V. 6, n. 68, July. 1892, p. 54. The most famous contemporary who took to the life in the country was Edward Carpenter. He felt the need for physical work, for open air life and labour - 'something primitive to restore my overworn constitution'. He found his physical health improved and the life was 'so congenial in many respects, so native, so unrestrained, it seemed to liberate the pent up emotionality of the years'. Contact with nature gave the 'quietude and strength' necessary to 'any sustained and more or less original work'. In his writings and lectures on the corruption of existing society and on the benefits of returning to a life on the land, Carpenter inspired many of those responsible for the formation of communes. He wrote for Freedom urging his readers to desert the cities for a more natural life on the land and his farm in Derbyshire became a centre of pilgrimage for communalists. E. Carpenter, My Days and Dreams (London, 1916), pp. 110-11, 105, 145.

was the Fellowship of the New Life which was formed in October 1883. Relying on moral improvement through individual effort, the society was little concerned with political revolution, seeking rather to set in motion a new commonwealth by pursuing a life based on the highest ethics. Their ideal society was envisaged as communal living arranged in the light of the values of utmost simplicity, mutual help, physical labour and brotherhood. All this, and their interest in quasi-religious universal redemption and closeness to nature, brought them close to Tolstoyanism. By 1889 a magazine called Seed-Time was launched which demonstrated the role of moral conscience in social revolution.¹ J.C Kenworthy told his readers: 'In our bitterness of heart we have listened to the negations of Marx and shut our ears to the words of the true prophets of the Reconstruction (Carlyle and Ruskin). The healing of society must come from within, through individuals and communities, who by living and extending the new life, will at last cast off from society the slough of the old'.²

The journal also carried reports on Fellowship activities, such as 'Rustic gatherings' where members would gather at a rural venue to hear a paper. At one such event the paper was on 'the return to Nature', and amidst 'the winds, the woods and water' the author spoke of a new unity between nature and the soul. The rediscovery of this unity would reveal a new understanding of truth, of beauty and of simplicity.³ By 1896 the desire to leave the city grew among its members and the idea of an agrarian commune was being discussed. Seed-time urged its readers 'to join hands in some simple and co-operative life...which has always been an aim of the Fellowship'.⁴ Many Socialists thus expressed support for the establishment of rural communes. It was largely amongst the Anarchists however, that such ideas found a practical outlet.

¹ Seed Time, Oct. 1894.

² Ibid., Oct. 1896, p. 3.

³ Ibid., Oct. 1889, p. 4. Several Anarchists became New Life Fellows and Charlotte Wilson recommended Seed-time to the readers of Freedom. The fellowship attracted all kinds of Socialists including Havelock Ellis, Edith Lees, Agnes Henry, Ramsay MacDonald and Edward Carpenter. C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 1. March. 1890, List 900, P. P.

⁴ Seed Time, n. 30, Oct. 1896, p. 2.

Of particular importance to the Anarchist communities was the identification of Anarchism with the questioning of established norms of material progress and the establishment of a decentralised and simpler form of society in harmony with nature. The Anarchist notion of progress was a kind of moving backwards, shedding all forms of elaboration and structure, down to the base points of community and production, eliminating both waste and oppression and enabling individuals to regain the pure condition of humanity's natural state. By the late 19th century it was evident that capitalism had formed a society where the scale of operations would increase with the size of the world market, and where production was dictated by profit at the expense of unequal distribution and an alienated labour force. A simpler, decentralised society was advocated by Anarchists on economic grounds, in that labour would be directly involved in essential production and distribution, and that the wasteful services and distorted patterns of consumption under capitalism would be eliminated; on social grounds, in that it would allow free individuals to participate without the repressive mediation of a higher authority; and morally, in that the replacement of competition and authority by co-operation would have the purifying effect of a return to one's natural state. Two forms of Anarchism were particularly relevant, Anarchist Communism and Tolstoyan Anarchism. Of the two, the latter offered a clearer rationale for the formation of communities. While both accepted the need for revolution, the latter saw this process as one of immediate moral regeneration which would undermine the foundations of capitalism. The establishment of communes could therefore be seen to be a first step in that direction. In contrast, the Anarchist communists, while adhering to communities as a long term ideal, were less enthusiastic about their prospects within capitalist society.

The Tolstoyan Communes.

The ideas of Tolstoy were the main inspiration for the communalists. Tolstoy argued that exploitation was the inevitable result of capitalism, coming from the dominance

of landowners over those who had no land and from the competition of capitalists who controlled labour and markets. This oppression was legitimised by the state. It followed that to remove slavery one had to first remove the state. This, however, should not be done violently, as it would only lead to a new kind of exploitation. Power was to be abolished by the rational consciousness of individuals, which would expose this power as being useless and damaging.¹ Tolstoy wanted a change, where the Christian foundations of life would replace the principles that supported the state as the basic institution of capitalist society. The challenge was sharpened by the messianic prophesy that the time for change was at hand, that 'each man has but to begin to do his duty, each one has but to live according to the light within him, to bring about the immediate advent of the promised kingdom of God'.²

The rationale for immediate revolution, of social change in advance of the abandonment of the state, was of obvious attraction to those who were predisposed towards community formation. The same went for Tolstoy's idealisation of nature and the simple life. His 'doctrines of happiness' was analysed by Herbert Rix who identified five elements. They were living in contact with nature, daily physical labour, family affection, free social intercourse, and health of body and mind. Tolstoy also advocated a return to the land. This would be possible with the cessation of overproduction and the manufacture of useless goods, and with the perfection of agriculture that was possible, especially in the manner Kropotkin had advocated. This ideal encapsulated many of the back to nature notions that pervaded the community movement. Indeed, the Tolstoyan movement gave fresh expression to many of the attitudes underlying popular Socialism. Tolstoy's simple New Testament ethic, his emphasis on daily contact with nature and his insistence on the need for physical labour appealed particularly to bourgeois men caught up in the routines of commercial

¹ L. Tolstoy, 'Address to the Working Class', Reynold's News, August. 1903.

² 'The Kingdom of God is Within You', The Lion and the Honeycomb: The Religious Writings of Tolstoy, (ed.), A. N. Wilson, (Collins, London, 1987), p. 285.

life.¹ Under his influence, colonies were established at Purleigh in Essex and at Whiteway near Stroud in 1897.

The Purleigh colony originated from the Croydon Brotherhood Church, part of the national organisation which Bruce Wallace had established in 1894 and which rapidly became the centre of a range of radical activities. The politics of the church were basically Christian Socialist and pacifist. Yet there was clearly a strong Tolstoyan current.² The church sought 'to apply the principles of the sermon on the mount literally to social conduct, which they interpret into action by efforts to found businesses on what may be described as Socialist co-operative lines'.³ The goal was to organise a million people into a 'Voluntary Co-operative Commonwealth'. This would 'bypass socialism and shame the capitalist system into decay'.⁴ The Co-operative Brotherhood Trust therefore operated several workshops, a book shop and stationers and the Croydon Brotherhood Dressmakers' Co-operative.

The Tolstoyan Anarchist, J. C. Kenworthy was the pastor of the Croydon Brotherhood. He had returned from visiting Tolstoy at Yansa Polyana in 1892, and his account of this Arcadian utopia found immediate favour in Croydon, where the idea of establishing an equivalent colony was born.⁵ In October 1894 he was invited to explain his purpose to the Fellowship of the New Life:

¹ The Clarion soon recognised the relevance of Tolstoy for ethical Socialists and began to spread the new ideas through its serialised versions of Tolstoy's Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Resurrection. See for example The Clarion, n. 350, 20. Aug. 1898, p. 272.

² Something of the church's eclectic composition was captured by Shaw in her description of the Croydon branch: 'It may be doubted if ever a more mixed and diverse crowd gathered within four walls than used to assemble at the Salvation Army tin tabernacle in Tamworth Road. Every kind of crank came and aired his views....Spiritualists, Anarchists, Vegetarians, Anti-vivisectionists and Anti-vaccinations'. N. Shaw, Whiteway: A Colony on the Cotswolds, (C. W. Daniel Co., London, 1935), p. 21.

³ The Labour Annual, 1896, p. 44.

⁴ The Clarion, n. 350, 20. Aug. 1898, p. 272.

⁵ J.C. Kenworthy, Tolstoy, (London and Newcastle, 1902), p. 214. Kenworthy was also influenced by Emerson, Ruskin, Henry George and the Industrial Village established by Herbert Mills at Starnthwaite near Lake Windermere in 1892. He had previously been active in the work of the Land Colonisation Society, which had been formed to establish a residential colony near London 'for middle class people who are anxious to escape from the conditions of city life'. See the pamphlets published by the Society, Management of a Hand-Husbandry Farm (1893) and Farm Labour Colonies (1894).

It seems to me we may now gather together sufficient evidence to enable us to formulate plans for the realisation of a right social order, which shall receive those who are willing and fit to enter, and to convince us that the horrors our ignorance forecasts, need no means come upon us. To begin with we can only emancipate ourselves by the power of association. We must confront capitalist organisation by fraternal organisation.¹

This was to be the first of several such exhortations and in January 1895 Kenworthy began editing the organ of the Croydon Brotherhood The New Order. The paper was to play a direct part in the process of community formation and Kenworthy constantly reminded his readers of the principles of the new life.² Under his inspiration, the profits from the church retail activities were set aside to purchase land for a commune. Kenworthy wrote:

some of our members are now seeking for a piece of land...where we can pitch "Brotherhood Camp" [and where] we may inaugurate our longed for exodus to a life of honest labour in the country. In such ways, a new society, rid of old cruelties and dishonesties, may be built up; the point of doubt is, Have we sufficient faith and unselfishness to give ourselves up to the work?³

The answer was yes and by the Summer of 1897 they had found an adequate location at Purleigh. The need to seek moral regeneration lay at the core of the settlers activity. The colony attracted those who saw in the ideas of 'brotherhood' and 'freedom' some of the principles that seemed to be ignored by both Socialists and run of the mill trade union and municipal organisers. An alternative route to the millennium was needed. It was not economic arguments that were required, but 'more feeling'.⁴ The first three members of the colony were Tolstoyans, William Sinclair, Sudbury Protheroe and Arnold Eiloart.⁵ They in turn were joined by several Russian Dukhobors who shared their beliefs that one should not obey men rather than god. A local newspaper reported that Purleigh was

¹ Seed Time, Oct. 1894.

² The New Order, Jan. 1897.

³ Seed Time, n. 24, April, 1895, p. 15

⁴ The New Order, July 1898.

⁵ Eiloart gave up his career as a chemistry lecturer to return to the land. He had studied both at the Royal College of Science and Cornell University. He was living in Croydon in 1894, but when Purleigh was founded he bought two fields for the colony. He was described as 'the embodiment of free healthy abundant life, with a ruddy complexion...and luxurious nut brown curly mane' and had tried 'many and extraordinary modes of living including camping in tents near the Thames' in his attempts to live without money. Shaw, Whiteway, pp. 171-4.

'composed chiefly of men who have spent a city life, and a few Russians who find life in England more desirable than in their own country. One of the colonists is a Russian princess. One of the men held a good position in a London bank'.¹ While the Russian group attracted the most interest, it was the middle-class refugees from commercial life who offered a sharper lesson in social change.²

The stated ideal of Purleigh was 'to live lives worthy of men; to endeavour to develop tolerance and unselfishness, and to work earnestly for a time when we can welcome all who care to come'.³ The settlers hoped to encourage others 'to wake up to the real meaning of life and follow their best perceptions of right in whatever direction these may lead. None of us are likely to reach perfection in one jump'.⁴ Or, as another put it, 'without any intention of forming a monastic brotherhood, we each desire to develop our lives along the lines which appeal to our inner consciences. While endeavouring to cultivate a spirit that esteems others better than ourselves, we still see that if we wait till everybody trows the same line no progress will be made'.⁵

For four years the group struggled to become economically viable. They constructed a greenhouse, planted an apple orchard, started stock-breeding and developed market gardens. A workshop, cow shed and fowl house were also built. As with many other colonies, the members had some difficulty fitting their experiment into the commercial world. When they advertised their products in the New Order, a correspondent

¹ Essex County Chronicle, 22. Oct. 1897. The publicity which the persecution of the Dukhobors in Russia attracted led Canon Scott Holland and Aylmer Maude to raise £1000 so that a new home for the refugees could be found in Canada.

² The sight of Helena Petrovna, a princess from the Caucasus, cutting wood and drawing water from the well in true Tolstoyan fashion was not an everyday event. Vladimir Tchertkoff, who settled at Purleigh with his wife, was another source of interest due to his aristocratic upbringing in St. Petersburg and subsequent exile on account of Anarchist activity, which contrasted with his simple life at Purleigh. At the colony he and his wife entertained visitors with vegetarian cooking.

³ New Order, April. 1898.

⁴ Ibid., Oct. 1897.

⁵ Ibid., Kenworthy himself viewed the new colony as an integral part of the Socialist movement: 'Small local and intense movements may always be discovered in association with every wider and more superficial movement of the people toward social reform. We ought not to be surprised to find at the heart of the present socialist movement, a body of people who elect to live socialism'. Commonweal, Nov. 1898.

complained, amazingly, that this smacked of competition, and that to be true to their principles they should rely on word of mouth and the Grace of God! The evenings were spent in cultural activities: discussion classes, music, dancing and the entertainment of the ever increasing visitors. The business of the farm was conducted at weekly meetings and nothing was undertaken 'unless all were unanimous in desiring it'. There were no rules; each was 'left to do as he or she likes'. Like Tolstoy, they ate vegetarian food, 'some because they dislike the killing of animals, others because they believe a vegetarian diet is healthier'.¹ The colony became, through the work of Aylmer Maude and Kenworthy, a source for the dissemination of Tolstoy's writings.²

The numbers who settled at Purleigh increased steadily - one estimate of the colony at its peak in 1898 was 65.³ The colony aroused widespread interest and it stimulated articles in the Daily News and the Clarion. Despite these reports and the support shown for the project, the community was breaking up by 1899. The colonists could not agree on the procedures for admitting new members. Should they accept only those who would be 'serviceable to the community' and shared its outlook or should they eliminate all restrictions and adopt an open door policy?⁴ The dispute led to a schism and the formation of a new colony at Whiteway. Weakened by the loss, the Purleigh group struggled on until 1900 when the health authorities closed the colony after an outbreak of smallpox.⁵

In 1897 those who split from Purleigh became pioneers at a new colony called Whiteway, where they intended to 'work in the highest interests of humanity on a less selfish basis'.⁶ They were joined by a journalist called Samuel Bracher who put over

¹ New Order, April, 1898.

² Aylmer Maude lived and worked in Russia for 23 years. Tolstoy made him feel 'dissatisfied with the methods of even so clean and honest a business as the one in which I was engaged'. Reaching the conclusion that he and his wife could live on much less than they had formerly considered necessary, they returned to England and joined the Purleigh experiment. Within a few years, however, they had lost heart and Maude had joined the Fabian Society. A. Maude, The Life of Tolstoy: The Later Years, (London, 1910), p. 532.

³ Labour Annual, 1898.

⁴ New Order, Sept., 1898.

⁵ Ethical World, May 19, 1900.

⁶ New Order, V. 5, n. 19 (New Series), Aug. 1899.

£1000 into the scheme. Unlike their Purleigh comrades, the Whiteway settlers admitted members without considering their suitability for the new life. Their first action in securing Whiteway, an upland farm near Stroud, was to burn all legal documents of ownership as instruments of governmental repression. 'This' wrote one settler, was 'by way of emphasising that the land was never again to be held as private property'.¹ Initially composed of nine men, five women and two children, by 1899 there were over forty settlers. Those who supported its inception included Aylmer Maude, the translator of Tolstoy, Malcolm Muggeridge's father Fred, and Gaston Marin from Belgium. There was also a woman called Catherine who had taught music at the household of Tolstoy.²

During the first years the land was worked communally and meals were prepared and eaten together. Possessions in the community were freely available to all, including outsiders, on the principle that things should belong to those who need them most. Initially the colony's basis was that there should be no private ownership of land. After two years of communal living however, the Anarchists came to the conclusion that: 'communism is possible only among people who have the utmost consideration for each other'.³ Deciding that 'individual initiative and responsibility does not necessarily mean a lack of unity', the land was divided into plots to be individually cultivated. Abandoning communism might well have been regarded as a setback, but it seems to have been treated more as relief, exchanging one system for another which they felt would work better. The original system was replaced with a form of individualism, though one based on possession rather than

¹ Labour Annual, 1900.

² Marin was the colony secretary for several years and had been a member of an Anarchist colony near Brussels. After taking a holiday in Cornwall, he and his wife decided to break their journey back to London in order to call in at the colony. They stayed the night and at a meeting the next day were offered a plot of land. Marin later founded a school at Whiteway. Shaw, Whiteway, p. 68. Rachelle Sinclair came from Russia via the USA and Rachelle Krimont, the companion of John Edelman, the editor of the Boston Solidarity, lived at Whiteway with her two children after her partner died. After the First World War Fred Charles moved to Whiteway with his wife. He joined other Anarchist veterans like Tom Keell and Lilian Wolfe. P. Avrich, Anarchist Portraits, (Princeton University, New Jersey, 1988), p. 154 and T. Keell to M. Nettlau, 19. Oct. 1922, List 186, NC, IISH.

³ Shaw, Whiteway, p. 76.

legal ownership. Individual plots were held on the basis of use-occupation and were allocated by a general meeting. When the occupier left Whiteway the land reverted to the control of the colony. Only after these changes did the colony achieve a degree of stability and efficiency.

What was the farm like? Lucy Andrews wrote of 'shallow soil...unsheltered land with not a tree on it'.¹ The rocky nature of much of the land made it very hard to get a living from the gardens, but with proper composting the soil was made fertile. Areas were allocated to fruit, vegetables and livestock. The earliest houses were cheap wooden constructions. No running water or electricity was available, so cooking and lighting was fuel based. Until the arrival of water mains most people collected water from a pipe fed by a spring. A communal hall was built by the colonists and this was used for plays, dances, music evenings and lectures.

The commune was also affected by scandal, for the dress and behaviour of the colonists shocked the neighbourhood. The women wore short skirts and no hats while the men went around bareheaded, barelegged and barefooted.² The settlers lived together in what must have seemed cheerful promiscuity and even bathed together in a pond, until the presence of 'prurient sightseers' led to the abandoning of mixed bathing. The colonists espousal of free union also attracted the salacious curiosity from the public. This, together with the intermittent presence of people like Emma Goldman, the Bahaist teacher Sidney Sprague and students from Ruskin who affected Hellenistic costume, ensured frequent visits. At the height of the hysteria, coaches used to draw up with cries of 'show us the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56. As late as 1929 Keell reported that 'the colony has very few trees on it....It is bleak and open [and the] soil is rather shallow'. T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 19. Feb. 1929, List 187, NC, IISH.

² Few other measures of revolutionary commitment were as directly liberating as the adoption by Anarchist women of simple and comfortable straight-lined gowns in place of the crippling layers of crinoline and whalebone that characterised conventional Victorian apparel. Nellie Shaw recalled how she and her sisters 'tremblingly cut off our dresses below the knees and our sleeves at the elbow', hoping 'that never again will women allow themselves to be seduced from the paths of simplicity or go back to the slavery of long, tight, unhygienic clothing'. Shaw, *Whiteway*, pp. 39-40.

women'. Malcom Muggeridge recalled his mother's dismissal of Whiteway as being 'in the class of Sodom and Gomorra'.¹ This was more glamorous than the truth. Yet many painted an unattractive picture: 'No idea can be given of the indolence and sheer animalism of this Whiteway Anarchia'. The license of sexual relationships and the propagation of free love ideas also annoyed the less liberated members, 'until in disgust, Bracher...his wife and others, left'.²

Whiteway was a wide-ranging experiment, embodying many areas of potential change. The settlers tried to restructure all that they had found wrong in established society. They 'wished to get away from towns and cities and live the "simple life"'.³ The settlers opposed private property, they practised non-resistance in their own lives, they worked towards equality for women, they favoured free unions rather than marriage, and their diet was vegetarian.⁴ Though poor materially, the colonists felt 'immensely rich, and at peace with the world'.⁵ After a great deal of conscience squaring the colonist's initial principle of eschewing money in any form, had by 1906, been eroded and individual Anarchists were running lucrative businesses.⁶ An element of pragmatism overrode what Shaw called the original colonist's 'belief that, given equal treatment, people would give us of their best'. Whiteway had its fair share of problems and had to make compromises to

¹ C. Darwent, 'Collectivism in the Cotswolds', in Country Life, V. clxxxii, n. 43. 22. Oct. 1988, p. 152.

² Hart, Confessions of an Anarchist, p. 81. Bracher and his wife attempted, unsuccessfully, to regain their title to the property. This failed since the property deeds had been burnt, the land being 'sent by the Supreme Being for the use of man and therefore [being] free to everyone'. New Order, Sept. 1899.

³ Hart, Confessions of an Anarchist, p. 43.

⁴ Their vegetarian diet was a conscious attempt to practice a doctrine of non-aggression: 'We live simply and economically. Bread and a little butter, porridge and tea or cocoa for breakfast; beans, lentils, or some other pulse, cooked with onions and potatoes are the chief dishes at dinner time, varied occasionally with rice, rhubarb, or wholemeal pudding, or bread and cheese. We never have jam or cake unless it is given to us, and then it is much appreciated'. Shaw, Whiteway, p. 56.

⁵ New Order, Sept. 1898.

⁶ William Sinclair, a farmer with dairy cows set up a milk service, while Rachelle Sinclair made cheese to sell to the local community. Sudbury Protheroe had been making bread there for several years and in 1906 established Protheroe's Bakery. Shaw, Whiteway, p. 87.

survive, but this was always done in the spirit of and pursuit of freedom.¹ It is interesting that Nellie Shaw regarded success as something that should not be bought at any cost:

Whiteway was born of an idea; it was a "love child". Nothing was planned, hence much of its spontaneous charm and also many of its shortcomings. Undoubtedly, had we formulated a scheme, made rules as to work, thought out the means by which we could continue when our small amount of capital was exhausted; above all, restricted our numbers to those who actually thought on the same lines as we did, we might have had something like a cohesive community, but at the cost of our liberty and our spiritual growth.²

The Anarchist Communist colonies.

Two of the settlements set up during this period were based on Anarcho-communist ideas. The first was the Clousden Hill colony founded in 1895 near Newcastle. This was followed by the Norton colony which was established in 1896 near Sheffield. The direct inspiration for both was a series of articles by Kropotkin published in the Nineteenth Century which later provided the basis for his work, Fields, Factories and Workshops (1899). In these articles he developed ideas which used the most up to date technological information to show the possibility of the Anarchist ideal of productive units small enough to allow federal organisation which would be both self-sufficient and self-managed on direct democratic lines.

For the settlers Kropotkin's theory of evolution and social organisation provided a means of dealing with two tasks. The first was to justify the assumption underlying the communities that co-operation rather than competition represented the natural pattern of social relationships; and the second was to show that small communities were not only morally preferable to the existing order, but also that they could be economically viable. Kropotkin's rejection of the pessimistic implications of Social Darwinism and his insistence that mutual aid was the most important factor in evolution had a special appeal.

¹ Ibid., p. 95. Although experiencing many problems, Whiteway continues to exist, providing a vital mainstay for the contemporary communal movement. In 1997 the settlement celebrated its centenary. For a description of life at Whiteway in the 1990's see Diggers and Dreamers: The Guide to Communal Living 1994-95, (A Communes Network Publication, Redfield Community, Winslow, Bucks., 1994).

² Shaw, Whiteway, p. 134.

Kropotkin's view was not that conflict was absent as a social characteristic, but that it was checked by the existence of a stronger tendency towards unity and natural sympathy. Kropotkin insisted that Anarchist communism was not a utopian suggestion, but a natural growth; a stage in the development of the natural and human world. In his view, Anarchist tendencies, such as co-operation and mutual aid, made the survival of society possible and constituted the foundation of the post-revolutionary order.¹

Of most interest to the settlers was the way Kropotkin put the argument for town and country integration into an Anarchist framework. Village communities would work communally held land in association and industrial work would be done in small workshops. A combination of agriculture and industry was needed for mutual advantage.² The combination of farming and industry would allow a choice of outdoor and indoor, manual or intellectual work. Such a choice presupposed that material wants would be simplified. Kropotkin's book was therefore prefaced with a statement of his interest in contributing to the discussion of the 'economy of energy required for the satisfaction of human needs'. He believed that his proposals were supported by the simplification of technical processes in industry and the considerable potential of intensive methods of agriculture, the possibilities of which were thought to be boundless.³ Kropotkin envisaged the local commune as the unit of production and distribution, with each giving according to their means and taking according to their needs. Communities, perhaps of 200 families of five people each, would require less labour to be done because they would be freed from the profit requirements of middlemen and transport costs. Labour would be available to 'everyone, strong or weak, town bred or country born'. Indeed, 'the amount of labour required to grow food under a rational culture is so small...that our hypothetical

¹ P. Kropotkin, 'Modern Science and Anarchism', in R. Baldwin, (ed.), Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, (New York, 1970), p. 157.

² P. Kropotkin, Fields, Factories and Workshops, (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1974), p. 83.

³ Ibid., p. 70

inhabitants would be led necessarily to employ their leisure in manufacturing, artistic, scientific and other pursuits'.¹ For the communal settler Kropotkin thus provided both idealism and practical guidance. There was sound advice on the viability of localised production in small workshops coupled with intensive farming.²

The Clousden Hill colonists seized upon Kropotkin's proposals that intensive farming under glass could find a favourable environment near coal mines where coal could be bought relatively cheaply without large haulage costs. By 1895 plans were well advanced and a prospectus was issued 'to all sympathisers of land colonisation'.³ Eventually finance was forthcoming and several settlers took a lease on the farm, paying an annual rent of £60. With £100 they purchased agricultural stock and tools.⁴ Despite his influence on the colonists, Kropotkin was not calling for the formation of communes. He intended to develop the possibilities open to revolutionaries in the event of the post revolutionary phase of reconstruction. This was demonstrated in a letter sent to the Clousden Anarchists after they invited him to become treasurer.⁵ He refused on the grounds of his opposition to colonies as a pre-Revolutionary tactic and in particular because of their low success rate.⁶

Nevertheless, the objectives of the founders were to show that intensive agriculture as recommended by Kropotkin was superior to regular cultivation and that it could succeed

¹ P. Kropotkin, 'Brain Work and Manual Work', Nineteenth Century, March. 1890. p. 474.

² Kropotkin's ideals were to filter out to wide number of people in the Garden Cities movement, the Plotlands movement, the Arts and Crafts movement and the Land Settlement Association. The sympathetic reviews of his books show how his writings were received with great interest. With certain ideological qualifications, The Daily Chronicle regarded Fields, Factories and Workshops as 'fresh air' and the Daily News commented that Mutual Aid was a 'deeply interesting and suggestive work [which] teems with principles which are both true and finely enunciated'. The Daily Chronicle, 3. Feb. 1899, Daily News, 29. Oct. 1902, cited in H. Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain: 1886-1917', Albion, V. 19, n. 3, 1987, p. 385.

³ Sunderland Herald and Daily Post, 22. March. 1895.

⁴ Liberty, Feb. 1896.

⁵ The letter was reprinted in Liberty, March. 1895.

⁶ He was sympathetic, however, and for several years kept in touch with them. It was at his suggestion that Freedom launched an appeal to collect money, tools and seeds and enlist volunteers. P. Kropotkin to A. Marsh, 4. Oct. 1895, Marsh papers, n. 14, file 1, IISH.

with a group of workers with little capital.¹ The settlers also hoped to show that in their internal life they were offering an example of Anarchist communism and that in their external life they would adopt economic relationships as close to communism as possible. This would mean close economic connections with local co-operative societies.² The community's prospectus also stated that the settlers hoped to 'give an object lesson to those who are desirous of solving the unemployment problem' by attempting to settle the unemployed on the land.³

The first balance sheet for the colony published in March 1896 reported that 'whilst the results have been promising, the colony finds itself hampered by lack of funds'. As a result an appeal was made to 'all friends and sympathisers'.⁴ For a few years the colony seemed to be making progress, the settlers believing that they were demonstrating the practicability of the Anarchist lifestyle. They had leased eighteen acres of land and organised a poultry and dairy farm, vegetable gardens and orchards.⁵ The colonists had no wage system. 'Every member works according to his or her abilities and enjoys all the colony can grant'. 'No working time [was] fixed or limited, as we believe that, considering these new conditions, each one will do his best, and work according to his abilities'. Matters of common concern were discussed at weekly meetings 'until unanimity is established' while in all other matters the individual was completely free.⁶ Kropotkin's

¹ Freedom, Aug. 1897. The same points were made in the Clarion. 'Two years ago several Newcastle Communists resolved to test, experimentally, the theories propounded by Kropotkin...It is an experiment in Communism, as applied to farm life. In other words, a number of people who have chosen the business of agriculture are putting to the test of practice the principle of having their goods in common'. Clarion, 24. Dec. 1897.

² The colony was supported by retail co-operative societies. Ben Glover, one of the original members, recalled that: 'Sunderland and Newcastle Co-operatives took a large quantity of tomatoes, cucumbers, and vegetables, flowers etc. Also Bradnams of Newcastle Green Market took a lot of vegetables, flowers etc., in fact they had good markets. Also local people used to come to the colony and purchase tomatoes. They got them...cheaper than they could buy them in the shops'. Quoted in W. H. G Armytage, Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England, 1560-1960, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961), p. 313.

³ The Torch, n. 12, (New Series), 18. May. 1895, p. 14.

⁴ The Torch of Anarchy, V. 2, n. 9, March. 1. 1896, p. 125.

⁵ Freedom, Aug. 1897.

⁶ The Torch, n. 12, (New Series), 18. May. 1895, p. 14

contention that in a non-competitive situation the management of one's affairs could be settled without compulsion was, it seemed, being borne out. This was not to last. The colony at this time was composed of fifteen men, three women and four children. Some were residents of the area, such as William Key and John Shirt.¹ Otherwise, it was an international crowd.² Anyone could join as long as they were 'willing to put....Communist principles into practice'.³ In February 1896 Frank Kapper reported that:

On the whole we are more than satisfied with the results of our efforts, and the same general satisfaction has been expressed by numerous visitors, including Kropotkin, Mann and other well known reformers.....With better resources at our disposal the number [of residents] could be considerably increased. The number of applications which we have received clearly shows the desire of workers to return to the land, and demonstrates the necessity of colonies similar to our own.⁴

The ease with which Socialist public figures came and went at Clousden was matched by ordinary members of the Newcastle ILP. In June 1896 for example, they held a mass picnic at the site.⁵

Nevertheless, the colony realised Kropotkin's fears that this type of voluntary association could not survive in capitalist society. Sectionalism developed within the colony

¹ Sunderland Daily Echo, 5. April. 1896.

² There was a Swiss Doctor called Complevitz, Harry Rasmuson and Peter Yonson from Denmark and Frank Kapper from Bohemia. Driven by persecution for his Anarchist beliefs Kapper came to London. Lacking work he moved to Newcastle in 1893. He joined other tailors and several factory workers to form an Anarchist club. Dick Gunderson was originally from Trondheim. He joined the colony in the winter of 1896. He had previously been active in raising funds at the London end of Emma Goldman's campaign to free Alexander Berkman. The Sheffield Anarchist, Nov. 1895.

³ The Torch, n. 12, (New Series), 18. May. 1895, pp. 14-15.

⁴ Clarion, 22. Feb. 1896. Jim Connell, author of 'The Red Flag', visited in November 1897, he found the colonists: 'ate all their meals together. The diet is about that of an ordinary workman. One is vegetarian, and the others enjoy sufficiency of meat. The colony provides clothing as it is needed....I noticed that [the colonists] went through their tasks with energy and freedom. They worked with a will, but, unlike the slaves outside, were not afraid to raise their heads, and if necessary, drop their tools on the approach of a stranger. I came away feeling how much more enjoyable and healthy is a life led among plants and flowers than the long-drawn-out agony of those who suffer in the mill or mine. There is talk of starting other colonies....If these come to anything, many of us may yet enjoy the romance of rose culture and the poetry of potato planting'. Labour Leader, 8. Dec. 1897.

⁵ Newcastle Evening Chronicle, 27. June. 1896. Elisée Reclus also visited the site in the summer of 1896 and although he was an opponent of such schemes, the fact that he took time off from the Socialist Congress then taking place in London, says something about the status it had achieved. Freedom, V. 10, n. 120, Oct. 1896.

and a division grew between the convinced Anarchist communists and a group who pressed for tighter organisation and a more business orientated approach. This they felt was the only way in which to ensure the farm's survival. They favoured converting the colony into a co-operative. Numbers of people began to leave and finally two of the colonists bought out their comrades.¹ The colony had nevertheless provided a valuable mainstay of experience and The Free Commune exhorted others to follow their example. The establishment of communities was urged as a revolutionary deed:

If attempts of this character were dotted up and down the country they would prove powerful examples, and would, no doubt, be imitated. They would help form the nucleus of a better society....[and] remove men from the contaminating influence of commercialism, and by bringing them in contact with Mother Earth, purify and broaden their characters.²

Another short-lived Anarchist communist settlement was the Norton colony established in 1896 near Sheffield by Hugh Mapleton, Herbert Stansfield, Frank Johnson and John Murray. The group leased a cottage and some land and lived communally for four years. There were no rules and 'all business is discussed and work arranged over the communal breakfast table'.³ The work was horticultural, using a large garden and five greenhouses, and it was soon clear that growing vegetables for the colony's own consumption was easy compared with trying to sell them in order to cover other costs. It was decided to concentrate on crops fetching the highest prices - tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and mushrooms. Even so, taking produce to the wholesale market was scarcely profitable, so the settlers 'created a market for the vegetables by selling them door to door'.⁴ The colony attracted the attention of sympathisers from local Clarion clubs in Sheffield. At week-ends they would visit the site and dine under the trees.⁵

¹ A flower business started by these two (Rudolph Wanderlick and Harry Rasmussen) proved a failure and came before the Newcastle Bankruptcy Court in 1902. Frank Kapper had already left the colony in October 1897 and moved to London where he became involved in an attempt to organise a new colony near Rayleigh in Essex.

² The Free Commune, June. 1898.

³ New Order, Oct. 1898.

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Clarion, 25. June. 1898.

By budgeting very carefully, the colony was able to keep itself solvent. Following the example of Carpenter, who lived nearby, they took up sandal making.¹ The colonists themselves wore sandals indoors and out, causing local people to regard them with misgiving. They were the archetypal collection of cranks; Mapleton explained: 'Included in our "Return to Nature" principles is vegetarianism, teetotalism, non-smoking and abstention from chemicals, drugs and all fermenting and decomposing foods'.² The Norton colony lasted until 1900, when their lease ran out and the colonists moved on.³ Johnson recalled 'we decided to disband and carry our ideals with us in the outside world...If the land had been freehold we might have been able to keep the colony going'.⁴ Mapleton was the colony's leading light and seems to have had some influence over who joined the colony, commenting that: 'communities need to be careful about taking invertebrate people as members because they can disgrace the name of communism'.⁵

Urban co-operatives.

Another demonstration of a new form of social existence was the introduction of urban co-operatives in production. The founders of such initiatives felt that the communal experiments could flourish just as well as in a workshop context as on the land. Instead of growing vegetables and making sandals, they made electrical goods and bicycles. Tolstoy was again the seminal force, although the co-operative movement itself had an influence.⁶

Urban co-operatives were a legal form, available in many useful varieties, that allowed the

¹ Frank Johnson recalled that Carpenter had been the impetus behind the scheme. Carpenter never joined the community, but engaged in similar activities to the settlers. He made sandals and grew vegetables and 'to show his solidarity with the working class', stood behind his vegetable stall in Sheffield Market. *Sheffield Telegraph* 30. Sept. 1957.

² *New Order*, Oct. 1898.

³ Mapleton later founded a shop which specialised in selling vegetarian produce. Joining Albert Broadbent, Secretary of the Manchester Vegetarian Society, he set up a factory which eventually grew into one of the largest vegetarian food concerns in Britain.

⁴ *Sheffield Telegraph*, 30. Sept. 1957.

⁵ Armytage, *Heavens Below*, p. 311.

⁶ In 1898, four such communities were reported in existence. By 1899 there were eight; and this seems to have represented a high point, for by 1900 the number had dropped to six. See *Labour Annual* for the respective years.

Anarchists to set further examples of a possible Anarchist way of life within a non-Anarchist social structure.

There was clearly a strong similarity between the co-operative movement and Anarchism. The former was a community based movement organised by workers in a particular locality in response to particular needs. They were spontaneous responses, that is, they were not part of a strategy devised by a central group of planners. Most early co-operators tried to combat hierarchy and reasoned that if all individuals had one vote, and if ownership was vested equally in all, and if only those who worked in or were actively involved in co-operatives participated in decision making, then democracy would be ensured.¹ In a way the co-operative movement was also anti-system. It quite specifically wanted to replace the existing economic system with one based on the principles of co-operation.

Another important affinity was the emphasis placed by the latter on the emancipation of the workers through their own efforts. For most Co-operators, Socialism had to be voluntary.² Legislative change through a Social Democratic state was not enough. The co-operators also held misgivings about involving the co-operative movement with parliamentary politics. Most of the societies had rules against such discussions, while political neutrality had been a policy of consumer co-operatives since their origin at Rochdale.³ Because of their day to day economic necessities, co-operatives were never as confrontational as the Anarchists in their opposition to the state, yet they expressed a real distrust of any authoritarian control. The co-operative movement clearly possessed numerous characteristics with which any Anarchist could have felt comfortable, such as a local base, some serious attention to democratic process, a goal of autonomy and self-

¹ S. Pollard, 'Nineteenth-century co-operation: from community building to shopkeeping', in A. Briggs and J. Saville, (eds), Essays in Labour History, (Macmillan, London, 1960), pp. 74-112.

² G. J. Holyoake, The History of Co-operation in England: Its Literature and its Advocates, (Trubner, London, 1906), V. 2, pp. 591-2.

³ GDH. Cole, A Century of Co-operation, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1944), p. 268.

management, voluntary membership, a vision of radical change and anti-hierarchy tendencies.¹

It was not surprising therefore that there was a continuing Anarchist concern for the co-operative movement. Anarchists felt the need to resurrect its revolutionary intentions and make the co-operatives the power base for a more egalitarian society. This was most clearly expressed in an article by Kropotkin in March 1898. Here he was less concerned with questions of immediate revolutionary activity, than searching for the historical and social ground which would nourish the growth of a libertarian society. This led him to examine the processes going on around him for hopeful signs. He found them in the co-operative associations. He saw that as they stood they were not Anarchist organisations, yet if they were to take up a unified federalist and 'encroaching control' stance then they would lead to Anarchism. What was missing from the co-operative movement was a clear vision, a future oriented theory, linking the small scale initiatives into federated units that might blossom into anti-systemic revolution.² The agitational question of how this change of direction was to be achieved was not discussed, but these ideas were broadly acceptable to Anarchists, who saw the co-operatives as an early prefiguration of the society they desired.³

Some trades were more susceptible to co-operative working than others. Shoe making, with its relatively high ratio of skill to capital costs seems to have been in the lead. It was, in fact, the policy of the more militant Leicester branches of the Boot and Shoe union in the 1890's to press the union as a whole to devote some of its funds to financing co-operative enterprises both productive and retail. Anarchists like Cores, Warner and

¹ For example, at a Freedom discussion meeting Gertrude Schaack gave a paper on the co-operative movement which stressed its libertarian characteristics such as self-management, solidarity and voluntarism. See Freedom, V. 3, n. 26, Nov. 1888, p. 8. and also Cherkosov's article in V. 17, n. 176, May, 1903, p. 27.

² Ibid., March. 1898. Kropotkin also wrote sympathetically on the potential of the co-operative movement in the Labour Leader in February 1897.

³ This area of sympathy can often be found in writings and speeches during our period. See for example The Torch, n. 6, (New Series), Nov. 18. 1894, p. 6., Freedom, V. 9, n. 97, Sept. 1895, p. 35. and J. Blair Smith, Direct Action Versus Legislation. (Freedom, London, 1909), p. 26.

Gorrie were active in many of these developments.¹ Other Anarchists were involved in co-operative initiatives. Wess, Barker and Turner all played leading roles in the Socialist Co-operative Federation which was established in 1887. It proposed to 'obtain both the means and experience to help secure to the workers the full fruits of their labour by organising the supply of all the needs of the community by the self-employment of the workers without the intervention of profit making exploiters'. To this end the society opened stores for the sale of food, clothing and other commodities. 'Whenever possible' the society would produce the goods to be sold in the stores.²

One of the main Anarchist co-operative initiatives was established in 1899 at 6 Victoria Road, Holbeck, Leeds. It was a cross between a colony and a co-operative workshop.³ In November 1898, Billy MacQueen reported that:

some while ago our comrade J.C. Kenworthy came to Leeds and in a number of public meetings tried to bring home to his audience the possibility of living up to the ideal even today. This notion went home in one or two cases and set folk thinking; with the result that a year ago G. Gibson, who had hitherto been a prosperous cycle manufacturer, decided to throw his works into the movement.

Gibson was joined by D.B. Foster and together they set up a workshop on 'brotherhood lines'.⁴ The co-operative was originally set up for victims of the engineering lock-out of 1897 but they did not fall in with it:

so it was started with comrades from various parts....They have not formal membership; no rules, no formal admission. If one thinks their place is there, they go. Only such accounts as are necessary to determine the question of weekly loss or gain are kept. There is no recognition of "fair"

¹ A. Fox, A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, (Oxford, 1958), p. 181. Co-operative workshops existed in other areas. Louis Ellstein, of the Leeds Anarchists, reported to the Co-operative Congress at Carlisle in June 1887 that the tailors in Leeds were attempting to start a co-operative workshop 'in order to free themselves from the yoke of the sweaters, but had failed through lack of funds'. The Productive Committee of the Co-operative Congress therefore advanced the requisite sum as a loan. Commonweal, V. 3, n. 74, 11. June. 1887, p. 191.

² E. Fox, The Socialist Co-operative Federation, (London, 1890), p. 2 and Socialist Co-operative Federation, Report and Balance Sheet for Half-Year ending in July 4th 1890.

³ New Order, V. 5, n. 19 (New Series), Aug. 1899.

⁴ Freedom, Nov. 1898. Foster had been a lay preacher in the Methodist church and a small manufacturer before joining the ILP. He came under the influence of Kenworthy and Wallace and his discovery of their form of Socialism led him, in 1897, to break with his church and also renounce his position in the social order. Convinced of the evil of capitalism, Foster was determined to be one of the workers and 'live on their level'.

or "equal" division of wages. Each takes from the treasury such as they need. Work if it is worth doing at all, ought to be done well, and, acting up to this, the Brotherhood make the question of profits secondary. If there are any they are to be ploughed back. At present the efforts....are mostly centred in the making of bicycles and electrical apparatus.¹

The colonists dispensed with the use of money and resorted to bartering services and goods. In addition to the workshop a few rooms were provided as living quarters, a kitchen and a reading room. They permitted the workers to come and go as they pleased and combined work with 'philosophical discussions'.² Beyond their own circle the members gave public lectures on their experiment in 'industrial communism'. But although trying to convince others, they were more concerned to see 'new advances on the lines of action, than to draw a large congregation of people who, like so many around us, stop short of theory'.³ For all the optimism, by 1900 the colony was not doing well. The venture had soon proved uneconomic. Foster was a business man and he soon perceived that where people are 'free' to work or talk, too much time is apt to be spent on talk. When he suggested regular work hours, it did not appeal to all the idealists and this led to the break up of the group. At the same time, they were acutely conscious of the familiar contradiction between running a co-operative workshop and then having to sell their products in the market.⁴

At Blackburn several lectures delivered by Kenworthy in 1895 inspired another group of Anarchists to follow Tolstoy's creed. Tom Ferris, a former participant in the Leeds enterprise, opened a 'brotherhood' electric shop in 1899 and tried to run it without

¹ Labour Annual, 1900. See also The Free Commune, June, 1898. The engineers failed to support the experiment, even though there was a long tradition of co-operative workshops within their union. These were largely inspired by the Christian Socialists led by Charles Kingsley whose Society for the Promotion of Workingmen's Association had a marked influence on the leaders of the union. During the 1852 lockout and the strike of 1876 co-operative workshops had been established by the ASE. It was not that unreasonable therefore for the Tolstoyans to think that they could encourage a similar development during the 1897 lock out. See J. B. Jeffreys, The Story of the Engineers 1800-1945, (Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, London, 1970), pp. 33-4, 42-4, 88.

² New Order, June, 1898.

³ Ibid., Dec. 1898.

⁴ Ibid., June, July, 1898.

the use of money. All money, he explained, 'is an expression of fear that our needs will not be supplied'; it is 'fear of our fellow man' that lies beneath 'nearly all evil and misery'.¹ Love could emerge as the true bond of relations only when all remnants of fear and its corollary, force, were removed. Ferris attempted to replace currency transactions with the bartering of services and goods.

We don't work to earn a living, but to help people. We say that where exchange comes in love is not. Now you see how it is that I cannot accept money payment....If anyone came to me and requested me to do some work, I would do it cheerfully, only they would have to provide the materials....I could not accept payment. I should be just as pleased if the one for whom I had done the work, if he wanted to show his gratitude, gave something he possessed to another person needing help....we aim by this process to get the principle of giving recognised as the only right one.²

In essence, what they were trying to do was to put into practice the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. They believed that love was the denial of force, even of resistance of evil by any form of compulsion and that truth involved perfect openness in all dealings; and that these principles when carried out would bring peace and goodwill to all: 'We believe in the kingdom of heaven upon earth, which embodies everything good that is in socialism without its attendant disadvantages. We believe in the socialist's principles, but insist on their being carried out by Christian methods'.³

Although the settlers 'believed in the kingdom of heaven upon earth', the spiritual nature of the experiment seems to have forced 'many purely materialistic socialists' to drop out. Nevertheless, the example impressed a visiting journalist who noted that the 'ideal community' the Tolstoyans sought would be a 'Merrie England', where 'nothing would be refused him who had need of it'.⁴ But this effort to live without 'external rules' soon broke down. Only Tom and Lilian Ferris went to the length of abandoning money. More difficult than getting everyone else to cease using money was the question of developing a true

¹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 1899.

² *Blackburn Times*, July. 15. 1899

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

understanding of each other and of what was believed to be right, which was essential for their high ideals of spiritual community. Their reports on the availability of work, and the increasing numbers who attended their meetings were encouraging, compared with their recognition of the spiritual barriers that had to be crossed. Practical experience strengthened their belief that the only difficulties in living the right life were internal, not external.¹ Nevertheless, it was probably both internal and external difficulties which rendered their ideal beyond reach.

Evaluation of the communal and co-operative experience.

The colonies represented concrete examples of a rather general aspiration within sections of British Anarchism. The same concerns that motivated the Purleigh and Whiteway settlers for example, were also demonstrated in the proposals made by an Anarchist group at Wickford in Essex.² Essex seems to have become a nursery of communities, as well as Purleigh and Wickford, the Labour Annual for 1897 listed three more ventures.³ How successful were all these colonies in living up to their ideals? As a start we could perhaps assess the experience from the perspective of the women. In their journals Anarchists gave major consideration to the reform of house work. As a contributor to The Freewoman stated: 'I feel that this question of housework...is fundamental....Women have no time to get free. They will only have the time when domestic work has been properly organised'.⁴ A possible solution to this problem was

¹ New Order, Nov. 1899.

² Ibid., Oct. 1898. See also the report of the Edmonton Anarchists who had started a co-operative in early 1898, the profits from which were to be set aside for a colonising scheme. Freedom, V. 12, n. 123, Feb. 1898, p. 12.

³ The first was Althorne, a place 'where socialist settlers would find skilled advice and like-minded comrades'. The second, Assingdon, near Hockley, had a small Anarchist group under James Evans; whilst the Forest Gate Christian Socialist League under E. W. Wooley announced their intention of making preparations for a land settlement there. Labour Annual, 1897. As late as 1913 plans were afoot to establish a commune near Tilbury. The settlers aimed to 'put into practice the principles of communism. We want to live a natural life and to demonstrate the practicality of producing for use, under a system of collective ownership'. J. W. Graves to T. Keell, 22. Nov. 1913, Freedom Archive, Correspondence 1, A-G, IISH.

⁴ The Freewoman, V. 1, n. 15, 29. Feb. 1912. Solutions offered ranged from machine age fantasies to schemes for collective and co-operative living. In October 1912 for example, Rona Robinson and Alice Melvin, Secretary for the Promotion of Co-operative Housekeeping and

advocated by communalists. Within their communes the Anarchists tried to revolutionise the domestic division of labour. Kropotkin urged the communalists to 'do all possible for reducing housework to the minimum...arrangements to reduce the amount of work which women uselessly spend in the rearing up of children, as well as in the household work, are...as essential to the success of community as the proper arrangement of the fields, greenhouses and agricultural machinery'.¹

For Kropotkin any experiment in communism had to be committed to the liberation of women from domestic drudgery. New technology might reduce the burden of household chores and that would help, but a big change in male attitudes was considered to be far more essential:

Servant or wife, man always reckons on women to do the housework. But woman, too, at last claims her share in the emancipation of humanity. She no longer wants to be the best of burden...Why has woman's work never been of any account?...Because those who want to emancipate mankind have not included women in their dream, and consider it beneath their superior masculine dignity to think of "those kitchen arrangements" which they have laid on the shoulders of that drudge - woman...let us fully understand that a revolution, intoxicated with the beautiful words Liberty, Equality, Solidarity would not be a revolution if it maintained slavery at home. Half humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half.²

Kropotkin was concerned to impress the importance of women's freedom upon the colonists, who for their part varied in their receptiveness. At the Clousden Hill colony 'all housework [was] to be done on the most improved system, to relieve the women from the tiresome work which unduly falls to their share today'. In practice this meant that the men

House Service, lectured to the Freewoman Discussion Circle on 'The abolition of domestic drudgery through the setting up of co-operative colonies'. *Ibid.*, 12 Oct. 1912

¹ *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 20 Feb. 1895, in J. Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', in C. Coates, J. How, L. Jones, W. Morris and A. Wood (eds.), *The Guide to Communal Living: Diggers and Dreamers 1994-95*, (Communes Network Publication, 1994), p. 40

² *Freedom*, V. 5, n. 56, July. 1891, p. 48

did the washing, while the women cooked and mended.¹ At Purleigh the men 'did as many things as possible for themselves...they made their own beds, not leaving it to be done by the women.'²

Other colonies were less advanced than Clousden Hill and Purleigh. Judy Greenway has clearly demonstrated that one of the reasons for the Whiteway colony dropping its communist ethos was due to the women rebelling against doing all the domestic chores for all of the men there rather than just one man. Many men would not do anything to help their female comrades. She has also shown that when the men did help out with domestic work they sometimes did such a poor job that the women ended up doing it themselves if only to ensure the smooth operation of the commune.³ Nellie Shaw of the Whiteway colony told a women's education class that 'the women do exactly the same kind of work as the men, and do not find it too tiring'.⁴ In her rightful exultation, what she failed to say was that the reverse was not true – it was a step towards equality, but limited by the failure of the men to abandon their work in favour of helping out with the colony's domestic chores. Greenway has shown that among many middle class colonists there was a class bias behind their reluctance to perform what they viewed as female or even servants' work. For example, at Edward Carpenter's Milthorpe settlement a working class man did most of the housework. Indeed, working class women, rather than their middle class sisters, appear to have done most of the work on the communes, undertaking jobs in farming, building, dress making, weaving and a range of handicrafts.⁵

¹ The Torch, no. 12, (New Series), 18 May 1895, pp.14-15 and The Clarion, 24 December 1897 cited in Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', p. 41

² The Clarion, no. 350, 20 Aug. 1898, p. 272

³ Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', pp. 41-42

⁴ Shaw, Whiteway, pp. 54-55

⁵ Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', p. 42

The Clousden Hill prospectus contained references to the status of women in regards to decision making as well as labour. The colony was 'to be regulated by a joint committee of all the adult male and female members'. Unexceptional as this may seem, it should be remembered that this was an era when women were often excluded from organisations and policy formulation. Quite how thoroughly the notion of equality was applied in the colony is more of an enigma. In the prospectus there was a reference to priorities in the distribution of food that might be in short supply: 'children and women to have precedence'. This could be read as some kind of positive discrimination, or more likely as indicating an acceptance of women as dependents. In February 1896 Kapper reported that: 'Our membership for the present consists of four men, two of whom are married and have small families'. That Kapper only mentioned the women as a married appendage of the male members suggests the ideal of sexual equality had not yet penetrated the minds of all.¹ Likewise in 1897 Henry Nevins visited the colony and after naming and describing some of the men, he wrote that the farm had 'about 100 chickens, 20 ducks, 3 cows, 2 horses and a dog: also one woman and three children'.² Judy Greenway has argued that such a subordination of women was not unusual in the Anarchist and communal press at this time. She notes that whether this was due to the misogynistic attitude of male writers or the actual relegated position of women within the communities is debatable, but that women were in any event in the minority in most communes. This was no doubt due to the social stigma attached to any woman who stepped beyond the bounds of acceptable social and moral norms. Edith Lees, one of the few single women involved in the Fellowship of the New Life, certainly experienced such social disapproval.³

¹ The Torch, n. 12, (New Series), 18 May, 1895, p. 15, and The Clarion, 22 Feb. 1896

² Freedom, V. 11, n. 126, June, 1897, p. 65

³ Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', p. 40. Lees was a member of a communal house that existed in the early 1890s at the Fellowship's co-operative household in Mecklenberg Square, in London. At this short lived experiment in sexual equality and simple living, Emma Brooke, Ramsay MacDonald and several other

The societies the communalists erected were supposed to be practical attempts to supersede capitalist competition with values of co-operation and to allow the individual free choice and self-determination without being controlled by a central body. Yet the colonies failed to maintain a viable and enduring alternative to the industrial system. The duration of most of the settlements was short. The chances were that they could not survive the difficult initial years, and yet they were intended to be long term. When they did endure, they did so through so many compromises that their original aspirations no longer held good. Whiteway for example, lasted far into the twentieth century by abandoning its original principles of communism.

The colonists faced serious practical difficulties including a shortage of suitable land, the lack of training of many of them in farming and self-sufficiency techniques and inexperience of hard physical labour.¹ The human management of the animals also demonstrated graphically the limitations of farming with a combination of good intentions but little knowledge. Frank Starr believed that the colonists had an 'absolute ignorance' of livestock, and other commentators also remarked on their limited experience.² Ben Glover made the point: 'it was a great pity that some of the men who came into the colony had no ideas for horticulture as they were a drag on the others who were expert in the way of running a market garden'.³

Fabians shared the personal dimension of Socialist politics with Agnes Henry, Louise Michel, Malatesta and other Anarchists. The correspondence between Ramsay MacDonald and Lees, the principal organiser of the commune, gives a picture of life at 'Fellowship House', including Lees's anger with Henry who insisted on discussing Anarchist theory at the breakfast table. E. Lees to R. MacDonald, 21. April. 1892, ff., 84-86, 30/69, MacDonald papers, PRO.

¹ A reporter from the Clarion remarked that at Purleigh, 'the colonists are mostly men who have no previous experience of manual labour and consequently they have had a harder time of it than, say, a group of labourers would have had'. Clarion, n. 350, 20. Aug. 1898, p. 272.

² Ibid., 24. Dec. 1897.

³ Armytage, Heavens Below, p. 313. This drawback brought seemingly chaotic situations in its train: 'A 30-foot smoke shaft, built by an amateur, who disdained the use of such a simple tool as a plumb-line, failed to maintain its tower of Pisa-like position, and came to earth'. Clarion, 24. Dec. 1897. The colonies were also racked by natural disasters as well human. At Clousden for example, the effects of a 'furious gale' in March 1897 were devastating. Two greenhouses were blown down and other damage caused 'to the extent that markets could not be met'. Ibid., 10. April. 1897.

There was also the problem of inadequate capital. Some of the settlers realised this and sought to remedy it, but came up against theoretical intransigence. At Clousden Hill for example, R. A. Walker and Charles Richardson wished to convert the colony into a 'co-operative agricultural society'. In a letter to the Clarion they unveiled a scheme for a co-operative farm which would have received financial help from the Co-operative Union (the Co-operative movement's national advisory federation). This proposed co-operative farm would deal in dairy produce and sell to Co-operative stores.¹ Had this approach been adopted the colony would have ceased to be open to anyone who wished to join, and would have abandoned the Anarchist principles of total democracy. Instead, the farm would have been restarted as a 'co-partnership'. This was a form of co-operative that would have had to submit its rules and reports to the State Register of Industrial and Provident Societies - a move that would have been anathema to Anarchists. Membership would be limited to those who bought shares, and shareholders could include co-operatives outside the farm as well as those at Clousden. Whilst Walker's scheme might have overcome the colony's financial weaknesses, it would have been at the expense of fundamental principles. Not surprisingly, the majority of the settlers did not share Walker's perspective on the future and insisted on preserving their autonomy. Walker and Richardson therefore left in 1896, protesting against 'communal' agriculture.

The lack of capital meant that co-operatives, Anarchist or otherwise, were often unable to devise structures to maintain a boundary between those who worked and those who owned or controlled. In short, the identity between owners and controllers (which meant that all workers must be members and all members must be workers, i.e. no absentee non-participants with controlling power) could not always be maintained. Many Anarchists thus suggested that the co-operatives were simply slightly modified versions of capitalist

¹ Ibid., 20. Feb. 1897.

enterprises.¹ More important, the whole approach was grounded on the assumption that co-operators could peacefully compete the capitalists out of existence. The workers were to build up the new system inside the capitalist framework with the object of eventually superseding capitalism: they were to build up their own capital, not take over anybody else's. Yet the financial environment was inherently hostile to the emergence of the co-operative spirit.²

There was a more fundamental reason for the lack of durability of the experiments: the question as to whether or not there should be a selection process for entrants. At Purleigh the closed door policy was thought by some to be not only wrong in principle, but also an example of class prejudice, discriminating against those who lacked capital to add to the communal fund. This was one of the reasons for the departure of several settlers. Yet when there was a tendency to allow free access, as at Whiteway, the result was that there was an undoubted mixture of motivations. For some the communities were a positive force for change, but for others a means of escaping the pressures of society. Several communes attracted layabouts who contributed very little. To become a colonist at Whiteway no application was needed; all that anyone had to do was take a seat at the common table. 'The result was that whilst some of the colonists worked hard, the majority sponged idly'.³ There were certainly cases where individuals failed to live up to their promise. One individual, a Quaker named Tregelles was prone, whenever work threatened, to address to the almighty the question 'And what shall I do now lord?' to which the almighty always

¹ See for example Freedom, V. 7, n. 81, Oct. 1893, p. 72, and Commonweal, V. 3, n. 73, 4. June. 1887, pp. 178-9.

² The Labour Annual for 1898 for example reported that productive co-operatives were selling most of their products through distributive co-operatives and were facing bitter opposition from private employers who blacklisted participants. Labour Annual, 1898, p. 88.

³ Hart, Confessions of an Anarchist, p. 80. At Whiteway several colonists disappeared whenever crops required to be harvested, being 'keener on sharing the communal knife and fork than the communal spade and fork'. The Anarchists even resorted to the law in order to try and evict one settler who never planted anything on the plot of land she was given, refused to help the other colonists and even constructed her house on somebody else's chicken run. Apparently she also invited her friends to Whiteway so that they could 'seize other vacant plots'. Shaw, Whiteway, p. 78. T. Keell to M. Nettlau, 31. Aug. 1925, List 188, NC, IISH.

answered 'Rest, my son'.¹ The commitment of some was however, beyond question. Francis Sedlak set out to walk bare foot from the colony to London in mid-winter: a journey necessary because he would not use postage stamps, the tools of government! He did not wear shoes because he was a vegetarian and there was at that time no substitute for leather. He was returned to Whiteway by a farmer who had been alarmed to find him huddling, semi-conscious, in his barn, and knew at once where he must have come from.²

A grave shortcoming of the colonists was their failure to demonstrate brotherhood at work. The absence of rules within the communities meant that there was no way of ensuring that members pulled their weight. In November 1898 William Hone of Purleigh complained that some members were not really trying to make the commune self-sufficient: 'Much time spent in meditation coupled with vague visionary ideals that somehow things will come out right', he wrote, 'will never accomplish much'.³ A firmly practical man, he did not agree with the Tolstoyan principle of 'never actively objecting to the action of others', or letting people get away with shirking. The eccentric outlook of many of the Tolstoyans made things worse and as one observer wrote 'those of us who kept our sanity did not always keep our tempers'.⁴ Those Anarchists who attempted to test the moral power of the individual often experienced profound disenchantment:

To hold a commune together requires either a great identity of life-habits, or a stereotyped religious tradition: so that the members, from force of habit or from religious hypnotism, may not wish to do anything that runs counter to the communal customs. The only other thing, apparently, that renders communism possible is a very strong leadership dominating the entire group.⁵

¹ Shaw, *Whiteway*., pp. 78-9.

² Sedlak had gone to Russia himself to see Tolstoy and learn about his life. He was told by his mentor that the only place he knew where an attempt was being made to live an ideal life was at Whiteway. N. Shaw, *A Czech Philosopher on the Cotswolds*, (London, 1940), p. 27.

³ *New Order*, Nov. 1898. A former colonist from Clousden Hill took a similar line. 'Anarchism, pure and simple, would not do for agricultural or social life. It was not possible to get work done when any man might or might not work as he liked'. *Co-operative News*, 19. April. 1902.

⁴ A. Maude, *Life of Tolstoy: Later Years*, p. 546.

⁵ A. Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Dukhobors*, (London, 1905), p. 261. The internal wrangling within several of the communities made *Freedom* suggest that it 'would be well if the comrades who propose to live and work together in this fashion knew each other personally beforehand and felt that it was possible for them to come into close everyday relations with one another without

There were certainly reports of difficulties in living up to the high ideals expressed by those who sought to dispense with authority. John Paton recalled that 'Anarchist communism in its scientific basis was no easy doctrine for untrained and ill-equipped minds to grasp'. Thus early attempts to run a Glasgow commune on a Quaker pattern proved a failure. The result was, Paton says, that 'George [Barrett] and I, in consultation in advance, determined all the activities of the free commune in efficient bureaucratic style'.¹

The settlers also learned that to 'live anarchism', at least in the context of Victorian Britain, might entail personal risks. Having discarded the constraints of conventional society in favour of more personal moral directives, they frequently had difficulty maintaining their mental faculties: 'Partly owing to the strain it put upon men's minds and partly because every strenuous movement attracts some ill-balanced people, there was much insanity at Purleigh. At least five who lived at the colony....were subsequently put under medical supervision'.² Sometimes activists who left the colonies found it hard to readjust to normal surroundings. The New Order published a letter from a former Whiteway settler who stated:

Since leaving I have been working at my trade of engineer with the express desire to find if I could be honest and bring goodwill into play. I find it is well-nigh impossible. First, the employer does not understand why I do not ask a stated wage; on one job I left that matter to the manager, and found myself in hot water with the union; another job, I found, after three weeks, I was making machinery for Elswick, cartridge top making, so, of course, I had to stop. I have therefore, strengthened my opinion that the only place for me is a place where I can live in goodwill with my fellows.³

The correspondent was forced to return to the colony and resume a sectarian lifestyle.

Despite the very real problems within the settlements, one must acknowledge the likely depth of experience for those who participated. There is sufficient evidence in

undue friction. Certain temperaments cannot work together'. Freedom, V. 10, n. 116, Oct. 1896. See also Carpenter's article in the Commonweal, V. 5, n. 173, 4. May. 1889, p. 141.

¹ Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage, p. 221.

² Maude, Tolstoy, p. 546

³ The New Order, V. 5, n. 19 (New Series), Aug. 1899,

newspapers at the time and observations by visitors to note the occurrence of an almost ecstatic belief that a revolutionary process was being lived through. Additionally, as a means of heightening political awareness the process of alternative forms of organisation, where each and every institution of society could be undone and rebuilt in a new form, must have been great. It provided fresh inspiration for cultivating a richer social existence. Indeed, for many of the settlers the communes served as propaganda bodies in their own right, rather than as 'a haven of refuge'.¹ Although the communities were criticised for isolating themselves, several of them went at great lengths to spread their vision. For many settlers it was felt that a 'vigorous propaganda should go on side by side with any communal effort, which, after all.....could never be true communism whilst capitalism remained'.² Far from cutting themselves off from the rest of society, they often took numerous opportunities to persuade others to follow their example. Frank Kapper of Clousden Hill played an important role in the Newcastle Anarchist group and lectured to SDF meetings.³ Ralph Gunderson, also of Clousden was certainly not the sort of man to retreat from the wider struggle, having been involved in several revolutionary organisations.⁴ Yet activists like Gunderson were Anarchist communists, perhaps suggesting that they had less faith than their Tolstoyan comrades in the ability of

¹ The Free Commune, June. 1898. For example, several London Anarchists, who were seeking to establish a commune near Tilbury, stressed that they had 'no desire to escape the task of helping to change the existing order. We are not soldiers who are tired of the fight. On the contrary we want to live our Socialism all the time, and so give the maximum of our energies to the cause'. J. W Graves to T. Keell, 22. Nov. 1913, Freedom Archive, Correspondence 1, A-G, IISH.

² Freedom, V. 30, n. 325, May. 1916, p. 36. One of the perceived advantages of the communes was that 'in country districts....they are about the only means of propaganda likely to do much good. To convert country people, one must live with them'. Commonweal, V. 3, n. 60, 5. March, 1887, p. 77.

³ See for example the report of his lecture at the 1891 Paris Commune celebrations in Newcastle at the local SDF club in Freedom, V. 5, n. 53, April. 1891, p. 30. Kapper took a full part in the Anarchists' agitation on Tyneside. Early in 1894 he annoyed the reformist labour leaders by advocating that the unemployed loot shops and warehouses in order to feed their children. See Les Temps Nouveaux, 29. Sept. 1897.

⁴ In response to enquiries by the Austro-Hungarian government, Scotland Yard prepared a report on him for the Home Office in 1894: 'A tailor, a Scandinavian by birth; he was for many years a prominent supporter of the now defunct Club Autonomie. He was also editor of the Anarchist newspaper Die Autonomie, which was printed in German over here, but has ceased to exist. He is a violent Anarchist [and] has spent time in France'. PRO HO/144/587/B2840C. 17. April. 1894.

communal experiments to effect the changes that they desired. They therefore refused to ignore other modes of action.

The communities often accommodated printing presses which were used to spread the message through pamphlets and newspapers. Members of the communities translated Tolstoy's work and those who visited him returned with fresh ideas.¹ The settlers wrote frequently in Socialist journals speaking out against the evils of existing society, and looking forward to an alternative where communities would no longer be an exception. Anarchist communities were, in this sense, society's conscience - exposing where it was going wrong and providing glimpses of how different things might be. The communes therefore represented a moral challenge to the existing order. It was hoped that society would be changed over a long period through their example and persuasion. As a political strategy the communities were founded on the indivisibility of theory and practice - on the Anarchist value of direct action. No matter how incomplete its fulfilment, the essence of the communitarian belief was to close the gap between the outlines of a new order and the steps needed to achieve it.

Dennis Hardy has argued that the various 19th century settlements and the established order can be understood as a dialectical relationship, in the same way that Mannheim relates utopian thought to the existing order. The value of utopias is not that they should be realised in totality - if that were the criteria they would, like the communities, be regarded as failures. Instead, the argument is that every period gives rise to ideas which represent the unrealised and unfulfilled tendencies of that era. These intellectual elements then become the explosive material for bursting the limits of the status quo. In other words, the existing order gives rise to utopias which in turn break the bonds of the existing order, leaving it free to develop in the direction of the next order of

¹ Maudc, Kenworthy, Ferris and Sedlak all journeyed to Russia to arrange with Tolstoy ways and means of carrying forward their work. In 1896 Tolstoy granted full printing rights to the press at the Purlleigh colony after Kenworthy's visit. See The New Age, July, 1896.

existence. Hardy argues that to different degrees alternative communities introduced ideas and forms of organisation that were in contradiction to the established order and which represented the aspirations of a revolutionary process that took a variety of forms and was to continue after the communities disappeared.¹

While Hardy's contention may have been true to some extent, one should not over-emphasise the importance of the communes in any process of historical change or of their place within the labour movement. The Anarchist communities never amounted to more than a handful of people. The settlements were always a minority form of revolutionary activity. While the co-operators in non-revolutionary times may have seen their role as exemplary to encourage some general development, the spirit of the enterprise could not but be affected by the loneliness of it all. The desperate need to live in good fellowship was unsupported by the general social situation or a social movement. Inevitably, therefore, no matter how much the intention was to provide examples for others, the world at large appeared hostile and the enterprise tended to represent not so much an attack on the world but a withdrawal from it. This separation was in turn reinforced by the strict admission policies adopted by many of the communities, policies which justify the accusation of sectarianism and which weakens the colonists' claim to have been an expression of the wider labour movement.

The extravagant claims and excitement within the communities themselves were constantly tempered by outright opposition or, more tellingly, by the effective indifference of the rest of society. The Anarchist communities were treated as more of a social interest than as a threat to the existing order. Their activities were often reported in the labour press and sometimes in the mainstream press. Yet in the 1897 edition of the Labour Annual, only two pages were devoted to recording the activities of the communities. The

¹ Hardy, Alternative Communities, p. 218.

majority of the publication was geared to documenting the common areas of action within the labour movement, specifically the trade unions and political organisations.

Perhaps the greatest proof that the settlements presented a withdrawal from the fray lay in the fact that both the inspirers of the colonies objected to such initiatives. The group at Clousden invited Kropotkin to become treasurer of the fund. He refused, explaining that he had little faith in communistic settlements under existing conditions. He predicted that the members would spend years far from contact with the masses and therefore be unable to promote their emancipation - all in the interests of an experiment which had a great chance of failure.¹ Kropotkin believed the main obstacle to the realisation of his communal system was the conservatism of existing institutions. These would have to be swept away before the free commune could flourish.²

For different reasons, Tolstoy also thought the experiments premature. His explanation was that perfection could be reached only in concert and not by individual effort. 'There cannot be a community of saints among sinners', he stated, and moreover 'were one's friends to direct towards their inner spiritual growth all the portion of attention and energy which they devote to the sustainment of the outer form of community amongst themselves, it would be better both for them and for God's cause'.³ In principal, all of us, he added, must 'direct our whole strength, not to our outer surroundings....but to the inner life'.⁴ Opposing the erection of any Church under his name, he frowned on the existence of the Tolstoyan societies. 'The drawbacks of such organisations are much greater than their advantages', he wrote. For him 'to be a member of the old society that was started by God...is more profitable for oneself and for mankind than to be a member of limited societies'.⁵

¹ Liberty, March. 1895. For a similar view see Commonweal, V. 3, n. 60, 5. March, 1887, p. 76.

² Freedom, V. 7, n. 74, March. 1893, p. 14.

³ Tolstoy to Kenworthy, 26. July. 1896, in J.C Kenworthy, Tolstoy, (London and Newcastle, 1902), p. 243.

⁴ Tolstoy to the Brotherhood Church Croydon, March. 1896, in A. Maude, Tolstoy and His Problems, (London, 1901), p. 62.

⁵ P. Redfern, Tolstoy: A Study, (London, 1907), pp. 5, 120.

The fact remains that in Britain the main thrust of protest took the form of mass movements rather than a commitment to isolated communities. Most working-class Anarchists recognised this. Therefore the ethical life of the sectarian crank did not appeal to them.¹ The social composition of most of the communes supports this contention. The majority of the settlers were refugees from the city, big business and the professions who had opted for a different quality of life. They sought 'simplification, the saner method of living'.² A reporter who visited Purleigh commented that the colonists were 'dissatisfied with....the lying and deceit involved in commercial life'. They 'felt this was wrong' and decided that 'they must get back to the land, and earn their own living in a healthy and natural manner'.³ In contrast to bourgeois communalism, working-class Anarchists envisaged that the revolution would either take the form of an insurrection or be based upon an industrial working-class organised on Syndicalist lines. Communalism was a strand of Anarchism that was more utopian than the more practical Anarchist initiatives in trade unionism. Supporters of union action refused to cut themselves off and dream of a new world. They recognised that the real battles were taking place elsewhere. As Bernard Shaw remarked, there were two Socialist movements, 'one to sit among the dandelions', the 'other to organise the docks'.⁴ It was in the latter context that working-class Anarchists expressed their activity.

¹ As Leonard Motler explained: 'We do not intend to raise a cry of "To the Land!" forthwith. The factories must run. The railways must run. Food, clothing and housing must be assured. When a man does not know where the next meal is to come from, what use to give him a pamphlet on "Morality", or even "Proposals for a non-authoritarian Communist Colony"?....We, working amongst the people, endeavour to explain Anarchism in terms of field, factory and workshop; in terms of running industry for the good of all, not for profit....We go to the people not with experiments, but with practical proposals immediately realisable. We are men and women of the workaday world, not lily-fingered missionaries'. *Freedom*, V. 21, n. 221, Oct. 1907, p. 51.

² H. Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages* (London, 1921), p. 72.

³ *The Clarion*, n. 350, 20. Aug. 1898, p. 272. Organisations such as the Fellowship of the New Life and the Brotherhood Church were also middle class bodies, while the tone of the communal movements' journals, suggested they too were prepared for a bourgeois and intellectual readership.

⁴ Armytage, *Heavens Below*, p. 332.

**Chapter Five. Anarchism and the World of Labour: The New
Unionism 1889-1900.**

Revolution by the spontaneous action of the masses was a central feature of Anarchism, so there was always some ambivalence towards the labour movement, which for all its potentiality for mobilising the masses, often tended to be moderate in its aims and authoritarian in its organisation. The question of the position Anarchists should take in relation to trades unions was the subject of perennial debate. It was not, however, a question which admitted a definite answer. The Anarchists, though sharply critical of the labour movement, particularly during the 1880's when many became distrustful of any sort of formal organisation and were largely committed to insurrectionary methods, generally speaking did not fail to appreciate the importance of working-class association in militant activity like strikes.

This was especially the case after the union explosion of 1889-90, which allowed some Anarchists to move away from propaganda work and quasi-insurrectionary fantasies, into the potentially more fruitful area of strike leadership and trade union activity. The impact of the new unionism, by challenging the conventional stratification of the working-class both in fact and in people's consciousness, momentarily served to open the door to an engagement between revolutionary politics and trade unionism. Among Anarchist militants therefore, there ensued a debate as to how they should respond to these developments. Principal points at issue were the wisdom of permeation into unions, the use of the industrial weapon, and labour goals in general. The debate that ensued saw the development of ideas on amalgamation, workers' control and the general strike. Although this rhetoric remained vague and unspecified, and was the property of a handful of activists, it did something to help lay the basis for the future Syndicalist strategy.

Impossibilism and trade unionism during the 1880's.

While Anarchists had a theoretical opposition to all trade unions as reformist and exclusive, they seem to have had a particular aversion to trade unionism as it existed until

the late 1880's. Until then the movement was little influenced by Socialist thought. The TUC and most of the craft unions accepted Liberalism as their political commitment, and the few union-backed MP's who sat in the labour interest did so as Liberals or rather 'Lib-Labs'. The organised working classes largely accepted the boundaries of skilled, semi-skilled and 'respectable' workers, whose main shared aim was to stay above the level of the lower working-class, the casually employed or more or less unemployed. Non-conformist religion played as large a part in forming the values of many unionists as did any political ideology; and those who felt the need for change largely emphasised reform rather than revolution.

John Saville takes the miners' leaders of these years as his central example of the limited nature of working-class consciousness during this era. This he characterised above all as a 'fractured comprehension' of the world they inhabited, which led them into a combination of partial independence and broader collaboration, in the mistaken belief that it was possible to achieve a genuine fair deal within the framework of bourgeois society. In industry their aims were therefore summed up in the slogan 'A Fair Day's Wage for a Fair Day's Work'; in their social attitudes their adherence to Nonconformity led them to be fundamentally individualistic; and in politics they were prepared to accept the handicaps of parliamentarism.¹ Their overall outlook was therefore presented as economistic, limited, and dependent on bourgeois Liberalism.²

¹ J. Saville, 'The Ideology of Labourism', in R. Benewick, Knowledge and Belief in Politics, (London, 1979), pp. 213-26. For a more sympathetic view of the craft unionism of the 1880's see A. J. Reid, 'Old Unionism reconsidered: the Radicalism of Robert Knight, 1870-1900', in E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid, Currents of Radicalism, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 214-243.

² In attempting to explain the development of such reformist tendencies within the labour movement during this period, Saville and many other historians have utilised the controversial concept of the 'labour aristocracy', arguing that a section of the working-class went through a process of 'embourgeoisement'. See for example E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Aristocracy of Labour Reconsidered', in Worlds of Labour, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1984), pp. 227-51 and G. Crossick, 'The Labour Aristocracy and its Values', in Victorian Studies, V. 20, 1976. In recent years this theory has come under attack from those who have studied the material conditions of the groups in question more closely, and have found it difficult to justify the claim that there was a distinct elite in terms of wages, skills or separate lifestyles. See for example, A. J. Reid, 'Class and Organisation', in Historical Journal, V. 30, n.1, 1987, pp. 225-38.

A similar view was taken by Anarchist critics who argued that the unions represented a privileged minority of the workers, little interested in the conditions of the majority. It was the role of the Anarchists to 'watch narrowly the attempts now being made to set the aristocracy of labour against those comprising the fringe and to preach persistently the solidarity of the workers'.¹ One of the worst evils of the old unionism was 'the fostering of a spirit of caste'. Thus there were 'classes of workers, the head workers looking down on the artisan, and the artisan in turn looking down on the labourer'. The capitalist class encouraged this division, but 'so deeply [had] the degrading bourgeois spirit permeated society that Trade Unionists, even though they call themselves Radicals and Republicans....still cherish the snobbish conviction that they are a superior caste to the labourer'.²

Throughout most of the 1880s Anarchists were clearly depressed about unionism and its effect on the consciousness of workers. Indeed, one of Kropotkin's principal preoccupations of this period was to combat the possibility that the parliamentary tendencies that the English unions were becoming associated with, would be copied on the Continent. He voiced his contention that English unionists had allowed themselves to get involved in politics on behalf of bourgeois interests and did not concern themselves with questions related to Socialism:

They [trade unions] respect property and take up its defence. They are not concerned with the abolition of the body of employers and the capitalist mode of production. They accept the order of things as it exists today and concern themselves only with ameliorating the situation of the unionists, without worrying in the least about social reorganisation, which has become the vital question for workers on the continent.³

¹ *Commonweal*, V. 3, n. 53, 15. Jan. 1887, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 4, May. 1885 and V. 2, n. 33, 28. Aug. 1886.

³ *Le Bulletin de la Fédération Jurassienne*, 24. June. 1877, cited in C. Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 212. See also Nicol's report on the 1888 International Trade Union Congress. *Commonweal*, V. 4, n. 150, 24. Nov. 1888, p. 372.

An article such as this reveals a negative attitude to unions which, in Kropotkin's case, reflected a preoccupation with the revolutionary action of small conspiratorial groups.¹

Until 1889 therefore, palliatives were generally seen as something that distracted the workers from their true purpose. If the workers were going to fight for anything less than the abolition of the wages system, 'their case is hopeless', it was time and again affirmed.² Restricting their activities this way, Anarchists argued, unions posed no serious threat to the stability of the society in which they operated. All trade unionists were doing was bolstering up a rotten society and merely trying to modify its worst abuses, while leaving the source of those evils, the state and the wage system, untouched.³

The simplification of economic theory in the 'iron law of wages', led to the belief that whatever concessions the workers won, they inevitably lost in another form.⁴ The Anarchists believed it was impossible for the workers' standard of living to rise in capitalist society and therefore neglected reformist issues. Establishing unions and working for the gradual improvement of the workers' economic status was considered at best a peripheral occupation, and at worst an irrelevance practised by those who failed to anticipate the approaching social upheaval. Throughout 1888, while advertising union meetings in its columns, Freedom could still issue an editorial entitled: 'On workers' Union - towards what?'. 'Central committees strive for weak and useless aims....Only the overthrow of the capitalist system....is valid. All else is cold comfort - a waste of time!'.⁵

¹ In June 1881, at the Anarchist congress in London, Kropotkin issued a circular proposing to set up a secret organisation for the purpose of organising terrorism. This new body would consist of small groups in each country forming workers' conspiracies for the economic struggle. The most important resolution of the congress was the adoption of propaganda by deed which turned out to be disastrous for the Anarchists since it prevented them from taking an active role in trade unions for several years. Report on the International Revolutionary Conference 1881. Add. MSS 45, 345, fo. 38, NC, IISH.

² Commonweal, 15. Nov. 1890. See also Freedom, V. 1, n. 3, Dec. 1886, p. 10 and The Anarchist, n. 2, April. 1885, p. 1.

³ Commonweal, V. 2, n. 31, 14. Aug. 1886.

⁴ Ibid., V. 1, n. 3, April. 1885, p. 26 and The Anarchist, n. 5, July. 1885, p. 4.

⁵ Freedom, V. 1, n. 6, March. 1887, p. 21. It should be stressed however, that during the 1880's Socialists of all types believed the revolution to be near and were therefore unwilling to get involved with anything that did not have Socialism as its ultimate aim. For example, the SDF was also critical of union activity. 'Our comrades who are devoting so much time and energy to the

In October 1889 the Socialist League's Council issued a statement which summed up the prevailing outlook: 'In answer to numerous enquiries, the Executive....desires to express its opinion that members of the League do not in any way compromise their principles by taking part in strikes, but asks them not to let the revolutionary propaganda suffer thereby'.¹ Before the 1889 dock strike most Anarchists shared this impossibilist outlook, there being only tentative forays in organising workers.²

However, if the Anarchists clung to their view of improvements in wages and conditions as 'palliatives' they would remain on the sidelines, without mass support. The realisation that they had to reject impossibilism was clearly demonstrated by the SL's reaction to the strikes of 1887. The League was not indifferent to industrial battles, but saw them as chiefly opportunities for propaganda. 'Fellow Workers', declared the League's standard strike leaflet: 'You are now on strike for higher wages or against a reduction in your wage. Now, if this strike is but to accomplish this object and nothing more, it will be useless as a means of permanently bettering your condition, and a waste of time and energy'.³ To such events as the miners' strike the SL offered only sympathy. 'You must incessantly aim at....common action among all workers', the Glasgow branch declared. What this 'common action' was and how it was to come about was not explained however and all the League could offer was vague advice about struggling not for palliatives, but for the revolution. Having put forward this as a policy, they asked the miners to recognise that their struggle was 'but a prelude' to the 'great revolution'.⁴ As we

formation of these unions must never lose sight of the fact that the complete emancipation of labour from the thralldom of capital is the end to work for. This end can never be achieved by mere trade unionism'. Justice, 28. Sept. 1889.

¹ Commonweal, 12. Oct. 1889. For a similar view see also The Anarchist, V. 2. n. 6, Aug. 1888, p. 2.

² In 1886 for example, Charles Mowbray was attending the meetings of The International Tailor's Union. He lectured on the need for trade unionism to become international and to forge links between workers of various nationalities. Commonweal, V. 1, n. 6. July. 1886, p. 55. In March 1887 James Tochatti and Fred Henderson were trying to organise workers at Colman's factory in Norfolk. See Ibid., V. 3, n. 61, 12. March. 1887, p. 83.

³ Strikes and the Labour Struggle (SL Strike Committee, 1886).

⁴ Manifesto of the Glasgow Branch of the Socialist League to the People of Scotland (1887).

have already seen, it was this sense of apocalyptic expectation, believing the long-awaited event to be just over the horizon, that was so characteristic of the Anarchist mentality.

Due to its purist views, the SL missed an opportunity to win over sections of the labour movement. Already in February 1887 workers were showing signs of sympathy with the League. When the Glasgow branch called a demonstration in support of the striking miners, over 20,000 attended and the miners' leaders spoke from the same platform.¹ But the League did not learn from this experience. The demonstration was an exception. The miners returned to work and the League returned to its absolutist line. A branch of the League had been formed with good prospects in the mining town of Hamilton during the strike, forty miners enrolling at the inaugural meeting; but when Morris visited in April it was already in decline.² The Anarchists in the League failed to realise either the importance of the possibilities opened up by this foothold in the coalfields or the gravity of the defeat.

It was the League's negative attitude to industrial matters which was decisive in causing its failure in 1887-88 to organise the opinion in favour of Socialism which was spreading among the workers. The difficulties of preaching purism to workers engaged in class struggles was illustrated by the change in the outlook of several members who eventually left the SL precisely because they realised the importance of working within the unions. Unlike most members of the League, Tom Maguire realised that the early propaganda was too abstract to achieve a popular appeal. As early as 1884 he singled out the eight hours' day demand as of prime importance.³ This was in direct contradiction to mainstream Anarchist thinking.⁴ The purism which seemed reasonable to the Anarchists,

¹ Resolutions were passed expressing sympathies with the miners. Mr. Munn, the chairman of the Lanarkshire Miners' Association reported that Socialism was spreading within the union and the Anarchist McLaren believed 'we have allied the miners with socialism'. When he spoke 'he received three cheers for the social revolution'. *Commonweal*, V. 3, n. 58, 19. Feb. 1887, p. 61.

² *Ibid.*, 16. April. 1887.

³ E. P. Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.) *Essays in Labour History*, (Macmillan, London, 1967), p. 293.

⁴ The Anarchists were negative in their attitude to demands for an eight hour day made at the congress of the Second International in Paris in 1889. Merlino said that if workers accepted

was irrelevant where a mass movement was already under way. It seemed essential to Maguire and J. L. Mahon that the League alter its policy without delay in regard to the unions. However, this was rejected at the 1887 Annual Conference.

The TUC of September 1887, had seen the first serious challenge to the old Lib-Lab leadership. Hardie had come into sharp opposition with Broadhurst.¹ The fight for the Eight Hour day was gaining support and (while Mann and Burns were championing this fight) the SL and Anarchist groups were standing aside from the agitation. Mahon could see the futility of this policy:

Socialism...is on its trial! the socialists generally must soon choose between broadening the lines of their movement so as to include the practical aspirations of the working class, or becoming a mere group of factions, preaching, it may be, pure enough principles, but preaching them to the winds and exercising no real influence.²

Socialists - Mahon declared - should without further delay enter the unions, struggle to get elected, send Socialists to the TUC, and organise a group to combat the 'Burt and Broadhurst gang'. Despite the efforts of a few individuals to involve the SL in industrial affairs, it remained wedded to its absolute faith in revolution, a faith shared by most other Anarchists.³

legislation for an eight hour day, it would confirm their slavery. The abolition of the parliamentary and governmental system was essential for the overthrow of the capitalist system. Denouncing any 'stepping stone', he rejected the eight hours idea outright. 'We of course condemn long hours, but the essential thing we condemn is the capitalist making a profit out of our labour at all....It is the whole wages system we contend against....It is possible that the governing class might make a show of legislating in the direction of these palliatives; their doing so would certainly put off the revolution'. *Freedom*, V. 3, n. 33, Aug. 1889, p. 34.

¹ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, (Penguin, London, 1974), pp. 93-4.

² *Commonweal*, 8. Oct. 1887.

³ One of the few exceptions was the Leicester branch of the League. Warner, Holmes and Barclay for example, were all active members of the Leicester Amalgamated Hosiery Union. The crisis in the local hosiery industry in 1889 resulted in the League changing its impossibilist outlook, to a policy of making trade unionists and winning reforms. The Anarchists of the SL contributed noticeably to the LAHU recruitment drive in the villages surrounding Leicester. See B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism: Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906*, (Leicester University Press, 1987), pp. 91-4.

The retreat from purism.

The growing realisation that Anarchism was not sending out roots into the ranks of organised labour, precipitated a turning point in Anarchist thinking.¹ If until then the stress was on intellectual persuasion as the mainspring of action, priorities were now inverted and action was seen as the precursor of political awareness, or at least as its necessary corollary.² This new interest was generated by the changes taking place within the labour movement. In 1888 unemployment began to fall. Two boom years were to follow with an upsurge in the organisation of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Gas workers, dockers and women in unorganised casual work went on strike and joined unions for the first time.³ This new unionism also affected workers in scattered crafts threatened by machinery who needed the support of a big union. The recruitment of members from a wide range of industries meant that, commonly although not always, the new organisations were open general unions.⁴ The new unions were also characterised by a commitment to be 'fighting unions', charging low subscriptions, avoiding friendly-society benefits, and using their funds primarily for strike pay. Political radicalism, often embracing Socialist ideas, was also evident.

The industrial battles of the summer of 1889 onwards, provided an environment and example of aggressive organising by the working-class. Here was the spontaneous upsurge with its solidarity and mutual aid which the Anarchists had always hoped for. The supposed autonomy, spontaneity and apparent revolutionary potential of the new unionism prompted Anarchists to modify their views. Although the upsurge turned out to be more containable and co-optable than they had hoped, it did spark off a debate that outlined

¹ See for example Turner's comments to this effect. *Commonweal*, V. 5, n. 173, 4. June. 1889, p. 280-1.

² *Ibid.*, V. 6, n. 250, 29. Nov. 1890.

³ K. Coates and T. Topham. *The Making of the Transport and General Workers' Union: The Emergence of the Labour Movement 1870-1922*, V. 1, Part. 1, (Blackwell, Oxford. 1991), p. 96

⁴ See E. J. Hobsbawm, 'General Labour Unions in Industrial Britain, 1889-1914', in E. J. Hobsbawm. *Labouring Men*, (London, 1964), pp. 226-67.

some of the contradictions and affiliations between practical trade unionism and Anarchism.

After the 1889 London dock strike the Commonweal remarked that the biggest plus was that it showed that the 'old fringe of labour, the unskilled', could 'organise themselves at least as well as....the aristocracy of labour'. The strike it was hoped would lead to a weakening of sectional rivalries and a unification of the skilled and unskilled.¹

Anarchists pointed to the dock strike as an illustration of spontaneous revolt without prior organisation or leadership as proof of the possibility of Anarchist politics.² The strike had a particular significance for Kropotkin because it took place in England, a country whose moderate trade unionism he believed had had such a pernicious effect on the labour movement in Europe. Although the strike had ended in a compromise instead of expropriation, it had shown, he claimed, how a mass of unskilled workers could spontaneously create their union. Moreover, the strikers' success in paralysing the commercial life of the capital had demonstrated, in his view, the practical possibility of a general strike as a way of preparing for revolution.³ Malatesta also praised the dock strike for its spontaneity. It had spread from one industry to another and had been sustained by popular ingenuity. The mutual aid exhibited was proof of the revolutionary lessons to be learned from the event.⁴ The task of the Anarchists should be to lay the ground for a further outbreak of unrest and labour struggle.

¹ Commonweal, V. 6, n. 228, 24. May. 1890, p. 162. The creation of general unions was one of the main reasons why Anarchists were attracted to the new unionism. See Freedom, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 12.

² On August 13 a strike in the South West India Dock by a small group of men over a wage claim, sparked off a strike in the whole of the docklands. Its beginnings were quite spontaneous, though the strikers quickly came to rely on Tillet, Mann and Burns. The example of the dock strike inspired other workers, first those with some connection with the docks and then others, to similarly strike for better wages and conditions. T. McCarthy, The Great Dock Strike 1889, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1988), pp. 104-107. See also the report in Freedom, V. 3, n. 35, Oct. 1889, p. 45.

³ Le Révolté, 7. September. 1889. (I am grateful to Danielle Hipkins for the translation).

⁴ L'Associazione, 6. Sept. 1889. (I am grateful to Danielle Hipkins for the translation).

For the more optimistic Anarchists it seemed as though the revolution itself might break out as a wave of unrest spread from the docks to other industries. Nicol went as far as declaring that 'the East End is like Paris in the first revolution'.¹ Although the strike did at one point threaten to escalate from a general strike in the East End to a general strike in the whole of London - the call for this was withdrawn almost as it was issued by the strike committee. It was this that accounted for Kropotkin's accusation of cowardice against Burns in the face of potential revolution.² Kropotkin, however, had misjudged the mood of the time, as he had under emphasised the extent to which the strikers depended on their leaders for the next step to be taken. The strikers were certainly not intent on making the revolution, whether or not Burns had issued the call. Kropotkin's and Nicol's comments say more about the Anarchist psyche than the actual dynamics of the dock strike. Their religious-like faith in the immediacy of revolution clearly blinded them to social realities.

Although Socialists of all kinds were very active during the strike, making collections for the dockers, distributing literature at the dock gates and making speeches, the Anarchists were tourists, advocating politics from outside the struggle, rather than from within.³ The concept of building the workers' organisation, leading and organising their struggle as Burns was doing, was still strange to them in this period. Indeed the extent to which all types of Socialists rallied support among the dockers is unclear. Certainly that

¹ Commonweal, V. 5, n. 191, 12. Oct. 1889, p. 285. See also The Revolutionary Review, V. 1, n. 9, Sept. 1889, p. 138-9.

² Immediately after the general strike manifesto was issued on August 29th, Tillet tried to disown it. He doubted whether such an appeal could be successful, given the cautious leadership of the other union leaders. It would also alienate many supporters. The call was thus withdrawn. The strike committee refused to aid many of the striking workers who came out in sympathy with the dockers, thus lessening the possibility of the strike turning in a revolutionary direction. H. H Champion recalled that 'The Committee were obliged to refuse to assist such strikers since, it was obvious that the funds with which they were entrusted were meant by the donors exclusively for the benefit of the dock labourers. On dozens of occasions we were obliged to advise men who came to tell us of their intention to come out on strike, to refrain from doing so unless they were prepared to fight their own battle alone. At last it became necessary to publish a manifesto warning the discontented that if they came out on strike without the authority of the Committee, they must do so at their own risk'. H. H Champion, The Great Dock Strike in London: August 1889, (Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1890), p. 169, cited Coates and Topham, Making of the Transport and General Workers' Union, pp. 65-6.

³ Commonweal, V. 5, n. 190, 31. Aug. 1889, p. 279.

brand of revolutionary socialism which came from the Anarchists, played no direct part in the strike.¹ In 1890 the Anarchists were physically driven off by the dockers, after bringing their red flag and their bluster to a demonstration.² Kropotkin could not have got it more wrong than when he blamed Burns for holding back the revolution.

Despite the flights of revolutionary fancy indulged in by Nicol and Kropotkin, there were Anarchists who supported, or at least tolerated, campaigns for half-measures, so long as the workers 'keep it clearly in their heads that it is their own active determination' and not the parliamentary bill, that would bring the changes about.³ When demands for higher wages or shorter hours were advanced, purist pronouncements now alternated with expressions of sympathy. As Warner explained, whilst strikes could only 'palliate the evils of the system', this palliation was in the right direction.⁴ Jacob Kaplan agreed, conceding that the eight hour day had 'a certain importance in itself, for it was better to be a poor man and work eight hours a day than to be the same poor man and work twelve hours'.⁵ Anarchists were now encouraged to permeate the unions and make them 'an irresistible power for the elevation of the workers'. This would not necessarily be that difficult given that

the trade unionist is naturally inclined towards Anarchism, towards the principle of working out his own emancipation without having recourse to parliament. The trade unionist class is in fact the most self-reliant, and energetic portion of the workers. By means of their organisation they can certainly do very much to lay the foundations of the new society. If it

¹ On August 24th the East London Advertiser reported that 'the grit of the whole matter' was a fair wage and complained that Social Democrats and Anarchists were trying to use the strike for their own aims. East London Advertiser, 24. Aug. 1889. The Times reported that during a huge meeting at Tower Hill 'a Socialist flag was brought on to the ground, whereupon the greater number of those present demanded that it would be taken down, saying they did not want Socialism brought into the strike'. The Times, 2. Sept. 1889, p. 7.

² Commonweal, V. 6, n. 242, 30. Aug. 1890, p. 275.

³ Freedom, V. 4, n. 42, May. 1890. May. 1890.

⁴ Ibid., V. 3, n. 35, Oct. 1889, p. 45. J. Warner was a union officer throughout the 1890's, but his influence in his home town of Leicester was slight. Although he was the LAHU delegate to the local Trades Council he must have been an isolated figure being the only Anarchist on the council. With a penchant for advocating direct action, he probably suffered much ridicule from the majority of delegates who still espoused a Lib-Lab political outlook. Leicester Trades Council Annual Report (1892) cited in Lancaster, Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism, p. 92. His lonely vigil as the only Anarchist on the council was only relieved with the arrival of George Cores, a NUBSO delegate during 1892.

⁵ Arbeter Faint, 17. Oct. 1890, cited in Fishman, East End Radicals, p. 152.

appears to some of us that they are at present as a body rather inclined towards parliamentary methods, let us not forget that is due to the fact that the Social Democrats have been working amongst them.....and turning their ideas in the direction of state help. Their real inclination however, is independent action.¹

This outlook proved to be incorrect and the new unions remained committed to winning statutory gains. Although they were more militant and aggressive than their predecessors, the new unions proved to be even less sympathetic to Anarchism than the old craft unions. It was the new unions, in response to physical and legal difficulties, which forced the pace in the movement towards the creation of a political Labour Party. Although the Anarchists criticised such developments, calling on the new unions to ignore the state was very problematic.² It was because the workers they enlisted in their ranks could not afford to finance 'coffin club' activities and did not possess a monopoly of any particular skill, that the new unions were predisposed towards political action. Too weak to secure their defensive objects themselves, they turned to the state to do the job for them.³

Nevertheless, the unions it was argued, were naturally ripe for weaning into Anarchist policies and aims. They were self-reliant, voluntary, free and spontaneous workers' associations that were founded on the principles of self-help.⁴ Anarchists recognised that the unions were one of the few available means of protecting workers. The unions were 'very valuable in helping at least some of the workers to hold their own against the ceaseless aggressions of the capitalists'.⁵ Many Anarchists thus welcomed the sense of solidarity, class consciousness and mutual aid that was fostered when unions were involved

¹ Freedom, V. 4, n. 42, May, 1890, p. 20.

² See Freedom, V. 10, n. 110, Sept. 1896 and Commonweal, V. 1, n. 3, April, 1885, p. 26.

³ After the 1890 Liverpool TUC the great majority of trade unionists adopted the principle of large scale state intervention as the way of changing society. They were determined to work within the bourgeois state, not against it. Instead of the inevitable revolution that the Anarchists had predicted, existing society was, in fact, reinforced by a rapidly growing union movement. S. Webb and B. Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, (WEA Edition, London, 1912), p. 404.

⁴ Freedom, V. 5, n. 57, Aug. 1891, p. 56. Emphasis on the voluntarist nature of trade unions did not mean that Anarchists ignored the fact that many unions operated a closed shop. See Commonweal, V. 1, n. 3, April, 1885, p. 26.

⁵ Freedom, V. 7, n. 76, May, 1893, p. 26.

in strikes and unrest.¹ The Anarchists also sought to revive what they saw as the original anti-state outlook of the first trade unions:

It is an undeniable fact that the basis on which all existing trade unions were founded was self-help, defence against the capitalist class. In most cases the leaders were strong advocates of direct action and it was only when they became imbued with the spirit of officialism, had made positions for themselves and aspired to parliamentary honours, that they turned away from the old traditions.... This is still to be seen in the action of the present leaders of the older trades unionism and their differences with the leaders of the "new" unionism. The former have been corrupted by their intercourse with the capitalists, though they cling to the old ideas of independence, they refuse to act upon them thus justifying the criticism of the new school, who profess to be anxious to pass all sorts of acts of parliament for the benefit of the workers.²

The role for the Anarchists was to take up the work where the old, corrupted leaders had left off, to continue the movement but at the same time to give it a broader, wider, more complete idea.³ Anarchists believed that the union movement had not always been reformist, and had in fact passed through several revolutionary phases. For example, the Grand National Consolidated Union (GNCTU) of 1834 was seen as the first expression of the one big union idea. It was this form of workers combination that Anarchists sought to re-create.⁴ In its beginnings at least, British trade unionism was as revolutionary as one might wish. It was only after the collapse of the first revolutionary movement that the unions settled down to win reforms within the existing system. However, even though they embarked on the path to reformism, it was widely believed that the liberties they secured had been won by the use of illegal methods of direct action.⁵

¹ Commonweal, V. 7, n. 261, 2. May, 1891.

² Freedom, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 9.

³ Freedom, V. 4, n. 42, May. 1890, p. 20.

⁴ The GNCTU argued Kropotkin, 'refused to resort to the coercive action of the state, and relied chiefly, both for realising the revolution and maintaining the new socialistic life, on the power of the organised and federated labour unions'. Kropotkin, Modern Science and Anarchism, p. 52-53. Rocker believed that the GNCTU held 'tendencies which had an unmistakable relationship to the revolutionary syndicalism of our day'. It was 'a fighting organisation to lend all possible aid to the workers in their daily struggle for the needed betterment of their condition, but it had at the same time set itself the goal of overthrowing capitalist economy as a whole and replacing it with co-operative labour of all producers'. R. Rocker, Anarcho-Syndicalism, (Secker and Warburg, London, 1938), p. 56-60.

⁵ Cahm, Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, p. 214.

The evidence suggested that on the whole the positive characteristics inherent in trade unionism outweighed the negative and most Anarchists accepted that they had a role to play. Reports from conferences indicate that the predominant trend was in support of this policy.¹ Not everyone however shared this realism and some activists remained committed to impossibilism. They remained sceptical of anything but revolutionary violence and suggested that the comrades keep 'clear of trades union disputes'.² Such activists were nevertheless in a minority. It was also they who were responsible for the insurrectionary fantasies, based on the new outbreak of union activity, that appeared in the Anarchist press.³ Such fantasies probably helped reinforce commitment to the Anarchist cause. If one was able to see the possibility of the revolution breaking out during every strike, one's faith would remain intact. This sense of 'absolute presentness', which fostered the illusion that the revolution must come soon, was the single dominant feature by which Mannheim characterised the chiliastic mentality, of which he saw the Anarchists as the perfect modern examples.⁴

Those Anarchists who did embrace trade unionism positively could be found advocating methods and ideas often associated with Syndicalism. While supporting the struggle for palliatives, they were active in the growing demands for more union democracy, federation, amalgamation, workers' control and the general strike. Such

¹ For example, the meeting of Anarchists at the Autonomie Club in October 1891, which was attended by various SL branches, the Freedom group, the Sheffield Socialist Society and the Berner Street Club, came out in favour of union action. The findings of several other conferences held in the immediate years after were likewise in favour of union infiltration. *Freedom*, V. 5, n. 60, Nov. 1891, p. 86, V. 6, n. 72, Dec. 1892, p. 91, and V.7, n. 73, Jan-Feb. 1893, p. 8.

² *Commonweal*, V. 6, n. 239, 9. Aug. 1890.

³ See for example Samuels' report on the Leeds gas strike in the *Commonweal*, V. 6, n. 235, 12. July. 1890, p. 222. The strike emphasised the divisions between the impossibilist Anarchists in the SL and the Socialists like Tom Maguire. While Maguire and his comrades were trying to organise the gas workers and pilot the strike to victory 'in response to the men's wishes', the Anarchists 'told the people that no policy should be entertained but physical force. Now, while I believe in the use of physical force when necessary I think it is madness to advocate it on the public platform, and it is unlikely, as it would be undesirable, for the people to resort to it until other means had been tried and found wanting.' Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire', p. 301.

⁴ K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1960), pp. 215-18, 243-44.

rhetoric fitted in with wider developments during the 1890's. Attacks on the union hierarchies, calls for federation and other proto-syndicalist ideas were a strong feature of the labour movement during this period.¹

Union democracy.

The spontaneous activity among rank and file workers was an essential part of the explosion of new unionism and was one of its attractions to Anarchists. Yet the formalisation of this upsurge was carried through largely from above; and the machinery of government was shaped from above by the original leaders. In most cases, the centralisation and professionalisation of policy and administration met little serious resistance from below, for there were no powerful traditions of rank and file autonomy. From the outset the professional organiser had a key role in the general unions, carrying out functions of recruitment and representation which in the old closed unions was largely performed by the members. Many unions, moreover, owed their existence to the driving force of a particular leader, like Tillet of the dockers. The power of the key leaders within the formal machinery of union decision making was firmly entrenched, and this dominance they sought to legitimise by cultivating the identification and loyalty of the members. Tillet had sought to hold central control of union funds even in the days of his Tea Operatives' Union, with the object of preventing autonomous branch strikes from dissipating them. His policy was determined by his sceptical opinion of his members' wisdom in their use of trade union powers.²

The leadership's concern for central control was dictated by anxiety to conserve funds, and to ensure stability and longevity for their new creation. It was an outlook shared by Burns, Tillet and Mann, and was sharply reinforced by the downturn in the trade cycle which began in 1890 and by the employers' counter-offensive of the following years. This

¹ See L. Barrow and I. Bullock, Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement 1880-1914, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² J. Schneer, Ben Tillet: Portrait of a Labour Leader, (Croom Helm, London, 1982), p. 47.

goes some way to explain how the initially militant new union leaders could become the pioneer advocates of conciliation and arbitration. The decline in militancy on the part of the leadership was not however, always shared by the membership. For example, the price of the various stand down agreements of the early 1890's was, from the union side, the moderation of the membership. Members' resentments might simmer or rebound on the head of almost any leader. As Hyman suggests 'it was in this period that the notion of "rank and file" came to be regularly counterpoised to that of the "officials"'.¹

In October 1889 a Leeds branch of the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union was formed which incorporated a wide variety of trades, including the Jewish tailors. The new alliance with the gasworkers produced a great wave of enthusiasm in the ranks of the tailors and the Anarchists were at the forefront of this collaboration.² At the May Day demonstration of 1891 the Anarchists were enthusiastic supporters of unity with the gasworkers union: 'Hand in hand with their English brothers, the Jewish workers marched out to protest against the shameful exploitation which is being perpetuated against them'.³ However, by the end of 1891 the association with the gasworkers was virtually over. There was already a dark side in May: the demonstration was not as revolutionary as it had been before: 'not because the workers are more gentle, but because the leaders, the agitators, have become peaceful parliamentarians'.⁴ Jacob Kaplan, the leader of a tailoring branch affiliated to the union, began to discover confirmation of Anarchist theory in the

¹ R. Hyman, 'Mass organisation and Militancy in Britain: Contrasts and Continuities', in W. J. Mommsen and H. G. Husung (eds). The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain, France and Germany 1880-1914, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1985), p. 258.

² For an account of the Jewish Anarchists involvement in the tailoring unions in Leeds and the major assistance they were given by the gasworkers union see J. Buckman, Immigrants and the Class struggle, (Manchester University Press, 1983).

³ Arbeter Fraind, 8. May. 1891, cited in Ibid p. 124. Better relations with their fellow British unionists was of great concern to the Jewish Anarchists. For example, in 1895 William Wess was active in the committee whose aim it was to secure the cancellation of the resolution passed at the Cardiff TUC against the immigration of Jews, who were accused of taking jobs from native workers and 'blacklegging' during strikes. See J. Finn and W. Wess, A Voice From the Aliens: About the Anti-Alien Resolution of the Cardiff Trade Union Congress, (20th Century Press Ltd, London, 1895).

⁴ Arbeter Fraind, 8. May. 1891, cited in Buckman, Immigrants and the Class struggle, p. 124.

behaviour of the officials. The officers' wages had been 'raised to their hearts' content'. The right of the branch to protect its own members had been removed and replaced by the 'despotic rule' of the executive. The officers, fearing a reaction, had hastily amended the constitution so that a two thirds majority of all the branches was required for their removal. A member had been expelled for accusing a secretary of drunkenness, and there were awkward questions concerning the disposal of monies raised through collections. In a proper union concluded Kaplan, there ought to be weekly elections for office, for 'without leaders, there would be no misleaders'.¹ This was an extreme stance, yet it reflected the concern about the way in which the union was heading.

Soon after the Anarchists and their followers left the union, after a public row between Kaplan and Mahon, who was on the union executive.² After leaving the gasworkers the Anarchist tailors found themselves in deep distress. Unorganised, they faced an immediate counter attack by the masters in the shape of a wage cut. On 24 June 500 workers struck but were forced into submission within a week. The local Labour press rubbed in their situation. Having been members of the gasworkers' union, they were now in 'a very foolish and weak position'. They thought it useless to pay two pence a week 'when nothing was up'. The likelihood was that they wished 'they had remained under the leadership of Cockayne, Paylor and Co. (the Gasworkers' union)'.³ Sticking to Anarchist principles could be a costly business.

Eventually, in 1893, an independent Jewish union was organised, the Leeds Jewish Tailors, Pressers and Machinists. From the outset the union was subject to the same tensions as the alliance with the gasworkers. The union was poised between 'responsibility'

¹ Arbeter Frait, 11. Dec. 1891. cited in Ibid. p. 126

² Arbeter Frait, 25. Dec. 1891, cited in Ibid. p. 128. The rupture produced profound gloom on both sides. So great was the disappointment on the Jewish side that, years later, Kaplan was still defending himself against accusations of responsibility for the break. Kaplan was a key figure in both the Leeds and London Jewish labour movements. By 1912 he was the secretary of the London Ladies' Tailors' Union and was calling for a general strike in the tailoring trade. See Fishman, East End Radicals, p. 295.

³ Yorkshire Factory Times, 1. July. 1892. cited in Buckman, Immigrants and the class struggle, p. 135.

and militancy. The latter tendency was well expressed by a tailor in 1895. Within the union, instead of attention to the real problems - capital, competition and machinery:

Ceremony follows ceremony. Straight away, there is a stream of "propositions" and "seconders" and "Mr Chairman"....If, perchance, one forgets to say "Mr Chairman", one has already broken a rule....Books of rules are written just for their own security.¹

Yet other workers had learned the need for discipline. As one respondent put it:

I see nothing wrong in the act of saying "Mr Chairman". If there are simple people who know nothing of trade unionism, is it not a way to teach them more respect for the union by showing respect for the leaders?....What the honour of being chairman means is quite familiar to us. He has to put up with the many false arguments....and, afterwards, he gets boycotted from his work whilst his own union fails to stand up for him.²

The divisions between 'spontaneous' Anarchist organisation and the 'disciplined' alternative grew, so that Kaplan was one again denouncing his opponents in a clear and vehement manner: 'People....travel to conferences paid with hard earned pennies from the labour unions to represent the workers' interests and all they do in the end is to make a place for their lowly intrigues'.³ The union remained a hybrid mix of the two outlooks. On the side of organisation, the Anarchist influence was apparent, however, in the 1896 decision to elect officers biannually and to appoint a council of delegates from every workplace to oversee the executive.

Those officials who propagated the concept of collective bargaining were especially singled out for attack by the Anarchists since their outlook entailed that the relationship between unions and bosses was presented as merely an economic one; they appeared as partners in a market transaction, rather than enemies in a war for control.⁴ The only people who favoured boards of conciliation, argued Mowbray, were the bosses and the union leaders.⁵ Yet what criticisms like Mowbray's failed to address was the fact

¹ Arbeter Fraind, 15. Nov. 1895. cited in Ibid., p. 141.

² Ibid., 29. Nov. 1895.

³ Ibid., 1. Sept. 1893.

⁴ Commonweal, V. 2, n. 31, 14. Aug. 1886.

⁵ Ibid., V. 6, n. 240, 16. Aug. 1890, p. 259. Charles Mowbray was a lay official of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors (AST). In December 1892 Mowbray reported that as unpaid

that a lot of union struggle was about forcing the bosses to negotiate and recognise unions in the first place and arbitration boards could provide such an opportunity. Revolutionary posturing was largely irrelevant in such a context. The aims of striking workers were normally such as to permit scope for compromise; trade unions did not seek expropriation, but to manoeuvre into a strong negotiating position. When they compromised Anarchists poured invective on them, but this was really their whole rationale.

Anarchist criticisms of any moves towards arbitration also ignored the fact that unilateral regulation of the trade was a widespread aspiration of craft workers who wanted little interference from the state or from bosses. They sought to exert a firm control over the size of the labour force, enforce apprenticeships and to preserve the craftsman's status.¹ Any commitment to collective bargaining would entail that bosses or the state had a right to regulate the trade. There was a widespread libertarianism amongst craft unionists like Robert Knight of the Boiler Makers Union who held strong objections to the extension of state powers. It was widely believed that the central requirement for labour's advance was the radical principle of freedom from external restraint.² Such an outlook was largely compatible with Mowbray's attack on arbitration, but as an Anarchist, he could not see how there could be any affinity at all between unionists who aimed at finding a respectable status within a pluralistic, liberal and capitalist society, and revolutionaries like himself. His attack on arbitration was more relevant to the demands made by the new union leaders in May 1891 for a State Board of Arbitration.³ To Mowbray this paved the way for 'a further extension of the principle of fixing wages and other conditions of labour by state

organiser, he and several Anarchist comrades were holding meetings in the East End to organise the tailors. Several new branches of the AST were established and efforts were made to 'begin a vigorous agitation amongst the women'. Mowbray thought that day to day trade union action and the winning of shorter hours, while it might 'not bring the Anarchist revolution immediately' [would] go towards it ultimately'. *Freedom*, V. 6, n. 72, Dec. 1892, p. 87.

¹ H. A. Clegg, A. Fox, A. F Thompson, *History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964), pp. 5-7.

² Reid, 'Old Unionism reconsidered: the radicalism of Robert Knight, 1870-1900', pp. 214-243.

³ Although many of the new unions were established on 'fighting lines', their leadership soon came to see the advantages of moderation and a conciliatory approach. See Clegg, Fox, Thompson, *History of British Trade Unions*, p. 93

regulations, and as Anarchists we are bound to protest against it, feeling sure that it would mean a fresh extension of the tyranny of the state'.¹

While Mowbray saw no affinity between reactionary craft unionism and Anarchism, other trade unionists did find areas of common ground. It is interesting to note that Anarchists like George Cores were active in the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO), a union that shared Robert Knight's belief in the libertarian principle of freedom from external restraint. This, as Cores's experience demonstrates dovetailed with aspects of Anarchism. Anarchism allowed such craft unionists to maintain their traditions of independence, but in addition enabled them to adopt a more revolutionary outlook in their dealings with employers from that espoused by the traditional union leadership. In 1893 for example, Cores was among the union militants in Leicester who sought to overthrow the official union policy of arbitration and compromise settlements.² The years after 1890 saw a major shift in the outlook and politics of Leicester's footwear workers with the Lib-Labism of the 1880's giving way to Socialism and in a handful of cases, Anarchism. This change was partly brought about by the growing discontent with the arbitration system. Arbitration, by removing the dispute to the slow moving machinery, gave the manufacturers both time and greater flexibility in introducing new styles. Moreover, fashions in shoes changed so quickly that by the time a price dispute was settled the product under question was often no longer being manufactured, having been replaced by yet newer models, or poor trade had returned, allowing the manufacturers to dictate their own price.³ The anti-arbitration campaign was however as much an attack on the

¹ Commonweal, V. 7, n. 265, 30. May. 1891, p. 51.

² A. Fox, A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1958), pp. 168-85. Cores also sat alongside his fellow Anarchist, J. Warner of the LAHU, on the local Trades Council. His rhetoric and skill at controlling meetings eventually won him a seat on the executive of the Leicester branch of the NUBSO where his ability at passing militant resolutions at branch meetings gained him some notoriety. See B. and S. Webb, Industrial Democracy, p. 11, and Commonweal, V. 2, n. 27, (New Series), 12. May. 1894.

³ Cores sent in reports to the Commonweal that explained how this process worked and how it fostered distrust of the arbitration board among the rank and file. See Commonweal, V. 4, n. 136, 18. Aug. 1888, p. 267.

attitudes of the union leadership as it was a reaction against management strategies. The arbitration system produced resentment amongst the work force, but the alternative, a plethora of strikes, threatened both the finances of the union and the political convictions of the union leadership which clung to the belief that arbitration was the best guarantee of trade harmony. The executive council's refusal to end arbitration gave rise to grass roots discontent and brought to the fore a new generation of unofficial workshop leaders like Cores.¹

Although many Anarchists supported the new unionism, this did not detract from the concern they held about over-dominant leadership. While the lack of revolutionary fire within the unions was often blamed on the personal cowardice of the leaders who favoured arbitration, as it rapidly became apparent that these leaders saw the next step in terms of electoral activity, the accusations changed to those of personal ambition.² Yet behind the personal accusations lay hardly grasped worries of a more general kind. There seemed to be a connection between over-prominent leaders, electoral proclivities and the denial of revolutionary aims.³

Gradually there began to emerge in the Anarchist press the beginnings of criticism of the new union leadership as a social phenomenon rather than as a collection of cowardly

¹ In the Autumn of 1893 unemployment in the trade was growing and Cores moved a resolution at a union meeting which called upon the authorities to take 'steps to improve the conditions of boot operatives who are plunged into extreme poverty by a system of production over which they have no control. This meeting is of opinion that hundreds of unemployed who are able and willing to work are in such a state of starvation that they will be compelled and entitled to take the means of subsistence by illegal means unless help is speedily forthcoming'. Cores' language shocked the older kind of union leader with his liberal sympathies and vivid sense of status and Alderman Inskip, an official of the union, attempted to oppose it. He was shouted down, much to his astonishment and the motion was carried. Inskip, however, organised a further meeting with about 1000 members present, despite appeals by Cores to 'resent official dictation'. The meeting rapidly degenerated into noisy confusion and only with difficulty was order restored sufficiently to take a ballot. The resolution was defeated. The meeting broke up in such extreme disorder however that this result was of dubious value. See Commonweal, V. 1, n. 16, (New Series), 25. Nov. 1893, p. 2. Fox, Boot and Shoe Operatives, pp. 185-86 and Freedom, V. 7, n. 83, Dec. 1893, p. 87.

² Commonweal, V. 7, n. 288, 7. Nov. 1891, p. 144. See also The Torch, n. 10, (New Series), 18. March. 1895, p. 3.

³ Commonweal, V. 6, 30. Aug. 1890. See also Agresti's article 'Strike Tactics', The Torch, V. 1, (New Series), n. 11, April. 1895, p. 6-7.

or careerist men. Mann and the other dockers' officials were now described as 'bureaucrats' who were keeping an exclusive grip on decision making. 'It seems that these superior persons have a "plan" which they will not allow more impetuous - not to say energetic - warriors to interfere with'. And simultaneously these officials were blaming some branches for their apathy. There was discontent in the rank and file and Mann had attended a stormy meeting at which strong complaints were made that union officials were aloof and difficult to contact.¹ Distrust of the new union leadership grew to such an extent that when Burns offered to help organise the East End tailors, the Commonweal suggested 'that Yanovsky, Wess and other Yiddish-speaking comrades [i.e. Anarchists] should not leave the work entirely in his hands'.² Experience had shown, argued Malatesta, that labour organisations, however revolutionary they might be in their initial phases, had a twin tendency to degenerate into reformist and bureaucratic bodies. This tendency was owing, not so much to personal factors, such as the corrupting influence of power, as to certain institutional factors. 'Every institution', he wrote, 'has a tendency to extend its functions, to perpetuate itself, and to become an end in itself'. When this tendency became dominant, bureaucracy, the de facto rule of officials, was the result.³

It could be argued, however, that leaders could mobilise effective support only if, and to the extent, that, they could mobilise disciplined collective action on the part of their members. This aspect depended on the members' willingness to subordinate their own wishes to common interests. The gains in control attainable only through collective strength were expected to outweigh any loss of individual independence, therefore in short, it was only through the power over its members which was vested in the union that it was able to exert power for them in negotiations. The problem however, was ensuring that workers' collective interests were indeed aimed at. In order to ensure that this was the case Louis

¹ Commonweal, V. 6, 6, Dec. 1890, p. 389.

² Ibid., 12, Dec. 1891.

³ L'Agitazione, V. 1, n. 13, 4, June. 1897. (I am grateful to Danielle Hipkins for the translation). For similar criticisms see also The Torch of Anarchy, V. 2, n. 8, 1, Feb. 1896, p. 108.

Ellstein, an Anarchist active in the Leeds tailoring unions, could go so far as demanding that his union change its chairman weekly.¹ While this was something of an absolutist stance it did reflect wider worries. In 1898 over 20 per cent of expenditure in 100 principal trade unions was on 'administration, working and other expenses'. While the figure for the ASE was 7 per cent and for the Durham miners 13 per cent, in both the Gasworkers and the National Amalgamated Union of Labour the proportion was 54 per cent; in the dockers 80 per cent and in the Dock Labourers 81 per cent. Part of the reason for this was the practice of paying commission to branch secretaries and to full-time officers from their more prosperous years. In 1890 the seamen had permanent secretaries in most ports and spent £10,000 out of £41,000 on salaries alone.² Developments such as this meant that it was 'possible for the first time to view the position of union official as a distinctive career, and to associate with the post a set of social perspectives and material interests divergent from - and even antagonistic to- those of the membership'.³

Discontent with the union leadership during the 1890's was certainly increased by the growth of this bureaucracy. Union structures were 'a miscellaneous and confusing collection of committees, personnel and institutions whose spheres of authority and relationships with those above and below them were seldom clearly delineated or precisely defined'.⁴ This was a recipe for tensions and anti-leadership rhetoric was common. Ted Leggatt, himself an active trade unionist, argued that the unions were 'far too centralist in their tendency, the ordinary worker has by no means so large a share of influence as he should have'.⁵ Freedom agreed; the new unions had 'developed within themselves...the

¹ Commonweal, V. 1, n. 11, (New Series), 16. Sept. 1893. p. 2.

² Clegg, Fox, Thompson, History of British Trade Unions, p. 95.

³ Hyman, 'Mass organisation and Militancy in Britain: Contrasts and Continuities', p. 258.

⁴ R. Price, Masters, Unions and Men, (London, 1980), p. 227.

⁵ Freedom, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 9. Leggatt was active in the cab trade union and was later to become a full-time organiser. Many London cab drivers had struck in sympathy with the dockers in 1889 and several were sacked. This provided the opportunity to form a Carman's Union. In August 1890 he was writing to John Burns on behalf of the London Cab Drivers Trade Union (LCTU), asking him to speak at St. Pancras arches 'for the purpose of impressing upon the minds of non-unionists the benefits they may obtain by becoming union men'. Leggatt later reported that 'the union lately formed is bringing us [the Anarchists] more in touch with the labour

vices which are a danger to every association, and which beset all fighting bodies - i.e., arbitrary authority, red tapism, wire pulling, conservatism and exclusiveness....they allow a sort of petty government within themselves'.¹ For Anarchists it was of paramount importance that union members resist the spread of this bureaucracy. It was with this in mind that Freedom urged that the power of union representatives at congresses be modified. It was necessary to 'make them delegates carrying out instructions [rather] than representatives who say and do as they choose rather than as those who have sent them desire'.²

Yet all that the defenders of leadership had to do was to argue its indispensability, implying that the anti-leadership offered by the Anarchists failed to explain how the functions of leadership would be filled, let alone reorganised. The Anarchists' anti-leadership and anti-bureaucratic ethos, when applied to trade unionism, provides a good example of their failure to solve the central libertarian problem of a reconciliation of solidarity with personal freedom and decentralisation. As we saw in chapter two, this was largely due to their organisational failings.³ The defenders of leadership could also counter with a 'you too' given the many examples of Anarchists holding office in the unions. John Turner became general secretary of the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks (NAUSAWC). George Jackson was general secretary of the Northern Counties Amalgamated Association of Tramway, Hackney and Carriage Employees (NCAATHCE). Cores and Warner were both on the executive of the LAHU.

movement'. Leggatt never failed to also stress the necessity of winning short term gains. In 1894, largely thanks to his organising activities, the union successfully resisted an attempt to cut the drivers wages. Commonweal, V. 2, n. 27, (New Series), 12. May. 1894, T. Leggatt to J. Burns, 20. Aug. 1890, Burns Papers, Add. MS 46289. f. 155. British Library Manuscript Room. The Torch, n.5, (New Series), 31. Oct. 1894, p. 11.

¹ Freedom, V. 7, n. 76, May. 1893, p. 26. The argument that unions fostered a 'sort of petty government' was also developed by the Webbs. They argued that most members lacked the skills, knowledge and experience to exercise constructive control over union affairs, which was obviously anathema to Anarchists. Coherent and consistent policy, insisted the Webbs, was impossible within the framework of what they called 'primitive democracy'. S. Webb and B. Webb, Industrial Democracy, pp. 203-4.

² Freedom, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 9.

³ For a discussion of Anarchism and the thorny issue of organisation see chapter two.

Until the development of Syndicalism, those who voiced anti-leadership rhetoric could not offer an alternative to established union government. Yet certain Anarchist trade unionists did try and limit the power of officialdom. For example, Wess and the other Jewish Anarchists helped ensure that all official posts on the executive of the Federation of East London Labour Unions, formed in 1890, were subject to re-election every three months.¹

Anarchist Labour Leaders?

The extent of Anarchist success in the field of trade unionism seems to have depended a great deal on the degree of their participation in the daily struggles of the workers, not merely as propagandists, but as 'labour leaders' in the fullest sense of the words. Anarchist trade unionists commanded the respect and trust of many workers because they attempted to directly ease their economic plight. This can best be demonstrated with a couple of case studies, William Wess and George Jackson.

When the London dockers appealed for a general strike in 1889, Wess was one of the East End labour leaders who responded. Alongside Mowbray, Turner and Lewis Lyons, he organised a tailors' strike committee.² The resulting manifesto, signed by Wess in his role as strike secretary, was a declaration of intent and in line with the current demands of militant labour.

Fellow Workers - You are well aware that a Commission of Lords have been appointed to enquire into the evils of the sweating system in the tailoring trade. The sweaters' victims had hoped that this commission would have come to some satisfactory conclusion....Finding they have put off their deliberations until next session, we have decided to take immediate action [and] join in the general demand for increased comfort and shorter hours...we demand:

1. That the hours be reduced to twelve, with an interval of one hour for dinner and half an hour for tea.
2. All meals to be had off the premises.
3. Government contractors to pay wages at union rates.

¹ Rules and Constitution of the Federation of East London Labour Unions, A. R. Rollin Papers, MSS240/W3, MRC, Warwick.

² *Commonweal*, Sept. 1889. Apart from his work with the tailors, in November 1889 Wess was also trying to organise a union for the Waterproof Garment Makers in Spitalfields. See *Ibid.*, V. 5, n. 203, 30. Nov. 1889, p. 382.

4. Government contractors and sweaters not to give work home at night after working hours.¹

The Anarchist press urged its readers to back the action and strike fever spread from workshop to workshop. Eventually 6000 tailors were idle. The driving force lay in the leadership of Wess. A reporter interviewed him on the 19th September, and he went on to explain the tactics employed by the masters. They proposed changes to an hourly rate which, in effect, would tie their employees to the old hours in order to obtain the same pay. They also attempted to draw out the negotiations so as 'to keep us in almost daily hopes of a settlement being arrived at and so prevent us from appealing to the public for funds and causing our men to resume work from sheer starvation'. To counteract this 'we have made arrangements with several provision dealers to give us credit'.²

Eventually Wess and his associates reached tentative agreement with the employers. It was conceded that hours would be reduced to twelve per day with an interval of one hour for dinner and half hour for tea. Only four hours' overtime would be worked in a week and not more than two hours' overtime be worked in any one day. The settlement was to be confirmed the following day after a meeting of the strikers had approved the terms. But the next day there was no ratification by the masters, while a rumour that the strike was off was spread by them to confuse the rank and file. Wess viewed the terms as disastrous, and alleged that the masters had issued posters falsely declaring the strike over, thus inducing a number to return to work, in order to force 'our consent to work by the hour'.

The effect would be this. If we consented to be engaged by the hour, we might go to the shops at eight...in the morning only to be told that there was no work for some hours, and then, when we came back, those of us who have families to support would be compelled to work till perhaps twelve o'clock at night in order that we might be able to earn sufficient for the day....that condition would counteract the very thing for which we are

¹ Poster of the 'Great Strike of London Tailors and Sweaters' victims', in R. P., MSS 240/W/12, MRC, Warwick. The manifesto was also signed by Mowbray in his capacity as representative of the West London District of the AST.

² The East London Observer, of 21. Sept. 1889, p. 5. The strikers were supported by having tickets issued to them with which they could secure necessities from grocery shops.

fighting - a uniform ten-and-a-half hour day....If all our men agree to work only a certain number of hours, one of two things must happen - more hands will be employed or we shall get more days' work in a week without having to do that work late at night and under the worst of condition.¹

Wess was confident, if the workers stuck it out, of victory. A printed handbill was issued by the strike committee denying agreement, with the accusation that the masters had broken their word by refusing to pledge the terms agreed on.² An appeal for financial aid was sent to other unions including the AST and dockers.³ At a mass meeting of strikers a resolution was carried which stated 'that this meeting pledges itself to continue the strike, and on no account to work by the hour; and further, it expresses its full confidence in the strike committee'.⁴

On 20th September Samuel Montagu and Lord Rothschild entered the dispute as mediators, writing to both the strike committee and the Masters' Association offering their services.⁵ Between them they persuaded the Masters to waive the hours question, but not trusting this spoken agreement, the strike committee said the masters must ratify their agreements in writing. The strike committee rejected arbitration (also on the premise that the radicals might, as they eventually did, lose control in negotiations) since the men had already offered maximum concessions. Rothschild used his powerful influence on the masters to get them to accede to the abandonment of the hours system, with ten and a half hour day to be binding on both masters and men.⁶ Eventually Montagu persuaded both

¹ Ibid.

² A poster on the 'Great Strike of London Tailors' issued by the Tailors Strike Committee on 16. 9. 1889, in R. P., MSS 240/W/12, MRC, Warwick.

³ Balance Sheet of the Great Strike of East London Tailors Extending from August 27th, 2. Oct. 1889 in R. P., MSS 240/W/13. Wess, MRC, Warwick.

⁴ Evening Standard, 23. Sept. 1889.

⁵ See S. Garcia Asher to W. Wess, 2. Oct. 1889 and S. Montagu to W. Wess, 29. Sept. 1889, R. P., MSS 240/W/13, MRC, Warwick.

⁶ Much to the discomfort of the masters, their men's cause, like the dockers', was being exposed to the nation at large, and was bringing practical support from established Anglo-Jewry and English Labour. On 29th a large demonstration was held at Hyde Park, where the Jewish tailors were joined by the West End tailors, Turner, Morris, Mowbray, Tochatti, Tom Mann and John Burns. Handbill for demonstration in Hyde Park, 29. Sept. 1889, in R. P., MSS 240/W/12, MRC, Warwick.

sides to accept a common accord on the principle of submitting the dispute to arbitration.¹ But this would take time and neither party wanted to prolong the issue. Compromise was urged on the masters, who finally agreed on 3rd October 'to all the five clauses of the previous settlement, plus an additional clause that the hour system be not introduced'.² Despite the outrage of many militants at the intervention of Montagu, who had outflanked the radicals in determining the settlement, Wess remained jubilant. In the final count, the participation of immigrants in successful strike action registered a tremendous advance. Although the victory was but 'a minor amelioration in the economic burdens of the masses', the workers were 'learning unity in action, and are moving step by step towards their self-realisation as a class'.³

George Jackson's union, the Tramway, Hackney and Carriage Employees, was formed in 1889 and had its headquarters in Manchester and branches throughout the North. It recorded 3,799 members in 1894 and 7,356 in 1899.⁴ In Preston in 1894 Jackson was leading strike action to demand a cut in hours and pay increases. In Preston, carters' hours ranged from 77 to 100 hours a week, for which they received from 14s. to 23s. 6d. Wages of two and a half to five pence an hour were common amongst horsemen, but it was the long hours that most moved Jackson, for they 'prevented carters from giving that care and attention to their children which, as a father, they ought to bestow on them'.⁵ Jackson also recorded the regular appearance of carters before the courts, fined for being asleep whilst in charge of a horse and cart, after starting work at three in the morning. He told the Royal Commission on Labour that the lack of meal-breaks obliged men to eat with reins in one

¹ On the 30th of September the Master Tailors Association wrote to Wess, as secretary of the strike committee, stating that they had 'unanimously agreed that all disputes between master and men should be submitted to arbitration'. Among those who would mediate were Rothschild, Montagu and the Bishop of Bedford. See letter to Wess, 30. 9. 1889, in R. P., MSS/240/W/13. MRC. Warwick.

² Commonweal, 4. October. 1889.

³ Ibid., 8. Feb. 1890.

⁴ Tramway and Horsemen's Half-yearly Reports, 1894 and 1899, cited in Coates and Topham, Making of the Transport, V. 1, p. 1, p. 178.

⁵ Ibid., 1894, p. 3.

hand and food on their knees, and that 'when nature calls....they cannot obey the call'.¹ Although the 1890's were generally a period of weakness for the new unions, Jackson was able to report several successful claims for shorter hours, increased wages and recognition, particularly in the tramway industry. Meal breaks, and in one case three day's annual holiday, were amongst the improvements won. Reduced hours gave Jackson particular satisfaction:

It hardly seems conceivable that such a change could take place in the conditions of the men in so short a time. From fifteen and a half hours per day to ten hours, exclusive of one hour per day for dinner, is indeed a wonderful record, and sufficient to persuade any man of the advantages of trade unionism.²

That many Anarchists largely abstained from working along the lines of Wess or Jackson explains the limitations of their appeal in the industrial arena. The successful trade unionists were those who could put their Anarchism, to some extent, on hold. Turner, Jackson, Wess, Leggatt and others did just this. Such Anarchists, however, did not always retain their radicalism. Often the day to day business of union work could take over completely. A union comrade of Turner's recalled that although 'the Executive of that day did not like him being an Anarchist, he never at any time to my knowledge allowed it to show itself during his work for the union'.³ Much can be explained by Turner's experience.

Following the dock strike, Turner helped form the United Shop Assistants Union and acted as unpaid president until 1896, when it amalgamated with other unions in order to form the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants.⁴ After the formation of the Amalgamated Union, Turner became a paid official and its first National Organiser. He

¹ Royal Commission on Labour, 1892, Q. 17, 893; cited in A. Marsh and V. Ryan, Historical Directory of Trade Unions, Vol. 3, (Gower, 1987), p. 230.

² Tramway and Horsemen's Half-yearly Reports, 1896, p. 9, cited in Coates and Topham, Making of the Transport, V. 1, p. 1, p. 179. The following year, the union reported gains of 1s. a week for corporation drivers in Portsmouth, Colne and Birmingham, and reduced hours in Nottingham and Cardiff.

³ The Shop Assistant, 13. Sept. 1924.

⁴ W. Richardson, A Union of Many Trades: The History of USDAW, (USDAW, Manchester, n.d), p. 16.

threw himself into a recruiting drive around the country and 'preached salvation by organisation'.¹ The membership grew rapidly as a result of his efforts. Turner's experiences in the amalgamated union had, however, brought about a change of approach. In the early days branches had come into being as different work places had come into conflict with their employers and then faded away as victory or defeat seemed to make union membership less important or more dangerous.² Now Turner, to ensure a stable membership, had introduced unemployment and sickness benefits and as a result had members 'of a good type, paying what was, for those days, a fairly high contribution'. His policy worked, but he was now primarily organising a union, whereas previously he had been primarily organising conflicts with employers. By 1907 the pressure had relaxed somewhat and Turner was a fairly comfortably union official of some importance.³ The small union before 1896 had been Anarchistic, that after 1896 was no different to the other new unions either in power distribution or policy.

Federation.

During much of the 1890's the union movement was characterised by widening insecurity. The economic downswing of the early 1890's had seen an employers' offensive which had left much of the new unionism weakened or dependent on stand-down agreements with employers.⁴ Faced with such threats, the survival of the unions seemed at stake. The main contribution to this destabilisation was made by the engineering lockout that lasted from July 1897 to January 1898. This dispute increased the receptiveness for proposals to alter institutions and methods of struggle. The success of the new Employer's Federation of Engineering Associations, tended to re-emphasise the need to respond in kind. As one member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) put it, 'Federation gave

¹ *The Shop Assistant*, 25. Aug. 1934.

² For an account of these early struggles see *Commonweal*, V. 5, n. 200, 9. Nov., 1889, p. 358.

³ P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, (London, 1967), p. 59

⁴ Hobsbawm, 'General Labour Unions in Industrial Britain', pp. 226-67.

victory to the employers, and want of it gave defeat to the men'.¹ Turner declared that 'we [now] see capitalists falling into line and federating, to resist the demands of organised labour by determined and united action....Are they invincible?'. He believed that the only answer was to respond in kind, the unions 'must oppose the alliance of exploiters, not with an isolated union, merely supported by others, but with the efforts of all unions in a great national federation'.² It was one thing however, to conclude that federation by employers could and should be countered by union federation, but another to say how this might be done. Many suggestions were put forward, the best known including P. J. King's 'Clarion Scheme', launched in 1898, and the official TUC scheme which eventually became the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU).³ Although they never forwarded a clear scheme of federation, the Anarchists were addressing the same concerns as the more well known activists.

For many trade unionists federation was seen as a means towards arbitration and as a deterrent against employer escalation. For the Anarchists, federation could certainly allow defence where the main motivation was money. With federation believed Leggatt, the engineers 'strike income would have been never ending....whilst the income to the employers from their federation would have always been a diminishing quantity from the natural consequences of loss of trade'.⁴ Leggatt's seemingly boundless optimism regarding the possibilities of federation and the solidarity of the organised working-class provides a good example of the Anarchist sense of 'apocalyptic expectation'. As we have seen, this was a key characteristic of the Anarchist psyche.⁵ Federation was also a way of outflanking capitalism, which at the level of the whole economy, was protected by the fact that the campaigns of different unions were out of phase and often mutually divisive.

¹ ASE monthly report, April 1898, p. 28, cited in Barrow and Bullock, Democratic Ideas, p. 108.

² Freedom, V. 12, n. 123, Feb. 1898, p. 85.

³ For a discussion of both schemes and others see Barrow and Bullock, Democratic Ideas, pp. 109-35, and A. Prochaska, History of the General Federation of Trade Unions 1889-1980, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1987), Chapter one.

⁴ Cab Trade Record, May. 1898, p. 10.

⁵ For a discussion of the Anarchist mentality see chapter two.

Federation was a way of escalating a dispute towards the expropriatory general strike.¹ Indeed, it has been argued that 'part of the British trade union movement in the late 1890s, before Syndicalism had really developed in its more recognised centres, was open and responsive to such ideas; and never more so than when it turned its collective mind to the question of federation'.² Despite this, it could be argued that it was natural for workers to define their interests not as members of a class, but according to demarcations imposed by the division of labour. Demands were normally framed in sectional terms and pursued sectionally. It must also be stressed that if fragmented issues, such as wages were the be all and end all of trade unionism, sectionalism made sense since it allowed groups of workers to concentrate on divergent immediate problems.

Nevertheless, federation would make national strikes a distinct possibility. These in turn it was hoped, would lead on to a general strike. Leggatt welcomed the amalgamated federation of sailors, dockers, gas-workers and coal porters in 1890 as 'a good thing'. However, 'if the new federation could only get the miners and railwaymen to join with them, they would have in their grasp the whole trade of the country....We are sure that a federation as large and powerful as this will be required to fight and defeat the federated unions of the capitalists'.³ As Leggatt's comments show, the escalatory perspective did not necessarily go with federation alone. It was also associated as much with amalgamation. Often, it was assumed the two would reinforce each other. For some, federation came second in desirability to the aim of only one union in each industry. Jackson, for example, was a strong campaigner for federation and amalgamation. During the 1890's his union, the Tramway, Hackney and Carriage Employees, absorbed several other carters' unions.⁴ The defeat of the engineers in 1897 drew a prescient comment from Jackson, who deserves

¹ *Freedom*, V. 4, n. 38, Jan. 1890, p. 32.

² Prochaska, *History of the General Federation of Trade Unions*, p. 12.

³ *Commonweal*, V. 6, n. 252, 8. Nov. 1890, p. 358.

⁴ The unions that were absorbed included the Bolton Tramways Union, the Manchester, Salford and District Lorrymen and Carters' Union, the Edinburgh Tramway and Carmen's Union, the Belfast Carters' Union, and the Huddersfield Carters' Union. Marsh and Ryan, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, V. 3, p. 232.

to be recognised as a pioneer campaigner (in an industry characterised by highly sectional unionism) for one big union:

One is bound to admit that some stronger defence is required than many of us can offer in our sectional unions, and that something will have to be done before long in the way of forming a more solid body of trade unionists than we have at present. Whether it shall be federation or amalgamation I am not at this stage prepared to say, but I am strongly of the opinion that all those sectional unions representing kindred trades or occupations should at once be amalgamated into one solid society, which would go a long way in assisting to bring an amalgamation or federation of all trade unionists.¹

Sometimes there were schemes seen as supplementary or as alternatives to national federation, including networks of local federation within particular industries. After the strikes of the summer of 1889, it was reported that 'great activity is at present time being manifested amongst all classes of the Jewish workers of the East End, in the formation of a federation of all trades'.² From the growth of individual unions came the recognition of the necessity for collective action as a more effective strike force. On 28th December at the Assembly Hall, Mile End, 4000 workers attended a meeting

with the object to get the agreement of the members of the various unions to the proposed amalgamation....The following resolution was put by comrade Wess: "That this mass meeting, recognising the benefits that can be derived from a combination of all existing unions, hereby inaugurates the Federation of East London Labour Unions."³

Wess was eventually elected secretary of the Federation. The affiliated unions included the Hebrew Cabinet Makers' Society, the Stick and Cane Dressers' union, the International Furriers' Society, the Tailor Machinists' Union, the Tailors and Pressers' union, the United Cap Makers' Society and the International Journeymen Boot Finishers' Society. All unions, skilled or unskilled, male or female were eligible to affiliate and no affiliated union could have more than one delegate on the federation executive.⁴

¹ Tramway and Horsemen's Half-yearly Report, 1897, p. 10, cited in Coates and Topham, Making of the Transport and General Workers' Union, V. 1, part 1, pp. 179-80.

² Evening Standard, 23. Oct. 1889. See also the Evening News, 24. Oct. 1889.

³ Commonweal, V. 6, n. 208, 4. Jan. 1890, p. 6. As well as Wess, Mann, Tillet, Turner and Mowbray also spoke at the meeting.

⁴ Rules and Constitution of the Federation of East London Labour Unions, RP, MSS240/W3, MRC/Warwick.

Despite this attempt by Wess and his comrades to prevent the centralisation of power, some Anarchists rejected the federation idea. A correspondent from the London Society of Compositors feared that the 'spontaneity of the individual's action [would] be hampered, not only by his own union officials, but by the officials from other unions as well'.¹ Turner however, saw no contradiction between federation and Anarchism. This was demonstrated in his report on the 1893 TUC. The congress had appointed a committee which had drawn up a scheme for a federation of kindred trades, whose member unions would appoint an executive committee. There were also to be local district committees 'arranged and controlled by the executive of the various groups'.² For Turner, 'the scheme....was very Anarchical in character, it was to be voluntary, to be managed and worked from within the societies themselves, not to be bound from without'.³

Dual Unionism or boring from within?

Concerns regarding union leadership and structure, meant that during the 1890's Anarchists were faced with similar problems to those that confronted Syndicalists later on, namely whether to try and win over the old unions, or start new revolutionary unions. At an Anarchist conference in October 1891 it was concluded that where the unions were so reformist that it was impossible to make revolutionary propaganda, activists should 'start new unions on Anarchist lines'.⁴ Fred Henderson, an Anarchist from Norwich, tried to do this; splitting from the postal union with several comrades because the executive were 'using their position to further their personal and political aims'. Turner however, responded to this break away, noting that it 'hardly seems worth while to split a union because some of its members may not be perfectly disinterested'. Henderson 'would have to go a long way before [finding] an organisation of which every member has perfectly

¹ *Commonweal*, V. 2, n. 22, (New Series), 17. Feb. 1894, p. 4.

² TUC Minutes 1893, cited in Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, p. 70.

³ *Freedom*, V. 7, n. 74, Oct. 1893, p. 45.

⁴ *Commonweal*, V. 7, n. 288, 7. Nov. 1891, p. 144. See also Tochatti's demand that if 'union leaders do not allow these principles [Anarchism] to be discussed, get as many of your trade as will, to form an opposition union'. *Ibid.*, V. 7, n. 315, 28. May. 1892, p. 4.

pure motives'.¹ The whole question was well epitomised in an Arbeter Fraint editorial which observed that the Jewish Anarchists were very active in the unions. There were, however, differences in the 'tactical and theoretical perception' of the unions. Some were for amalgamation with English unions, others for independent Jewish unions, and some sought only revolutionary unions. The editor called these diverse groups to heel:

It is of less importance for us to establish revolutionary unions than to develop the ideas and outlook of the unions already in existence....Not by external criticism, but by working from within and by criticising from within we can obtain an influence over the strivings of these bodies....We have to reckon with the workers as they are and not as we would wish them to be.²

On the whole, Anarchist activists concentrated on the existing unions, but there were exceptions. In Sheffield, the Anarchist dominated Socialist Society created their own union, the Sheffield and District General Labourers Union. The Anarchists believed it could avoid the snare of short term economism by being explicitly revolutionary. In 1890 the union issued a manifesto that declared that no remedy for the present evils would be possible except 'the resumption by the people, for their own use, of the land and capital'. All other efforts, 'even trade unions' would be 'of little use' unless they were made to serve this end. However, the Anarchists were 'ready also to help in the general Labour-movement....in the direction of shorter hours and suppression of the sweating system'.³ When it was formed the local employers said that anyone joining it would be sacked and blacklisted, but this did not stop the room being packed with men anxious to join. By the end of December, the union was making progress and had 900 members.⁴ By March 1890 it had 1400 members.⁵ The following November the union was leading a strike at Brown's

¹ Ibid., V. 5, n. 197, Oct. 1889, p. 333.

² Arbeter Fraint, 15. Nov. 1895, cited in Buckman, Immigrants and the Class Struggle, p. 154.

³ Manifesto of the Sheffield Socialists: An Appeal to Workers, (Sheffield Socialist Club, 1890).

⁴ Commonweal, 30. Nov. 1889. Ibid., 28. Dec. 1889. The President of the union was an Anarchist called Bullas. Other members included Fred Charles, Alf Kitson and John Sketchley.

⁵ Ibid., 1. March. 1890.

steelworks, which saw violent clashes with blacklegs.¹ The union had a brief existence and it seems that it disappeared during the employers' counter-offensive of the early 1890's.

Unions and the Anarchist Society.

It was the desire to see some form of independent workers control that made the Anarchists oppose the calls for nationalisation, that were emerging in union circles during the 1890's. The rejection of nationalisation was for the most part from first principles, based on hostility to the state.² Yet points were made which outlined a different conception of a Socialist society from that offered by the Social Democrats. As early as 1886 the Commonweal was urging the unions to federate nationally 'with the distinct intention of constituting themselves the nucleus of the socialist commonwealth....The unions contain within themselves all the elements essential for the constitution of a rational society; they are therefore pointed out as the pioneers of the new era'. The unions, due to the 'administrative capacity developed by their conduct' would be 'of enormous value in organising and assimilating the heterogeneous host of non-producers'.³

In May 1890, a Newcastle secretary of the 40,000 strong National Labour Federation, with its premonitions of 'one big union', wrote to Freedom stating that: 'As far as I can see the only means of realising Anarchism is to....devote our energies to pushing trade unionism into making demands upon employers for some share in the management of business and some voice in the distribution of profits, with the ultimate project of

¹ G. Hukin to E. Carpenter, 8. Feb. 1890, Carpenter Collection, MSS/362. 37, Sheffield Local History Library. Commonweal, V. 6, n. 212, 1. Feb. 1890, p. 38. On December 22nd 1889 the union had held a meeting in support of the strike at Brown's and Robert Bingham had declared that killing a blackleg was not murder since they were traitors. On the 28th of December two blacklegs were attacked by steel workers apparently incited by Bingham's speech. In February 1890 Bingham was charged with incitement to murder and tried at Leeds Assizes. The jury found Bingham guilty of using language which might lead to serious consequences, but not guilty of incitement to murder. R. S. Bingham to J. Bruce Glasier, 23. Dec. 1889. G. P., 1.1 1890/1 11-4, Sydney Jones Library. See also Commonweal, V. 6, n. 220, 29. March. 1890, p. 102.

² Freedom, V. 3, n. 30, May. 1889, p. 53. See also The Revolutionary Review, V. 1, n. 9, Sept. 1889, p. 131

³ Commonweal, V. 2, n. 33, Aug. 28, 1886, T. Binning, Organised Labour: The Duty of Trade Unions in relation to Socialism, (Socialist Platform, London, 1887), p. 93.

abolishing the proprietors altogether'.¹ Turner agreed, but also argued that 'the future federations of trade unions should come to an understanding and even unite for solidarity action, with co-operative societies of production and consumption'.² Jackson's support for federation utilised Kropotkin's co-operative ideals. A report of the latter's 1897 lecture on the 'Development of Trade Unionism', was included in his union's own proceedings:

His advice was now to go on steadily with trade unionism and co-operation and...to bring into more effective use the municipal powers which already existed, and enlarge them to the possession of buildings, land and machinery. As to "management" he supposed that English workmen would be quite as capable of managing their own business, if they got the chance, as the old craft guilds.³

The unions and their co-operative allies would be 'the framework' of 'the new society of free and equal co-operators'.⁴ The mission for the Anarchist trade unionist therefore was to 'educate and organise the workers to take control of their own affairs with a view to the establishment of federated industrial communes as the future form of society'.⁵ The essence of this was outlined by Turner. It would be necessary 'for the dockers' union to work the docks, the gas workers to control the gas works, the bakers to manage the bread making, [rather] than to entrust the management of everything to ever such a clever county council'.⁶ Leggatt insisted that 'the great root question is: Who is to control the means of production? Who is to control and organise the work? The men who do it? or the class who have hitherto controlled both?'⁷ Turner's and Leggatt's thoughts on

¹ Freedom, V. 4, n. 42, May. 1890, p. 20.

² Ibid., V. 12, n. 123, Feb. 1898, p. 85.

³ Tramway and Horsemen's Half-yearly Report, 1897, p. 10, cited in Coates and Topham, Making of the Transport and General Workers' Union, V. 1, part 1, pp. 108-9. For Kropotkin's lecture see Freedom, V. 12, n. 124, March. 1898, pp. 9-10.

⁴ Ibid., V. 5, n. 57, Aug. 1891, p. 56.

⁵ Commonweal, V. 2, n. 50, 25. Dec. 1886, 310.

⁶ Freedom, V. 5, n. 53, April. 1891, p. 27.

⁷ Ibid., V. 7, n. 76, May. 1893, p. 25. Their ideas were, however, criticised for their productivist leanings by Nettlau. He argued that unions, whether they existed under capitalism or were to be the basis of any future society, ignored the rights and interests of the consumer and only concerned themselves with the workers who were actually involved in any trade. See M. Nettlau, 'Responsibility and Solidarity in the Labour Struggle', Supplement to Freedom, V. 14, n. 145, Jan/Feb., 1900, p. 5.

workers' control are especially interesting given their later role in the Syndicalist movement.¹

If the unions were going to be the basis of any future society they had to also change their outlook and become revolutionary. A trade union reconstituted on revolutionary lines, however, required a change of outlook on the part of the rank and file. To simply pay the weekly sub was not enough. 'Something much more aggressive than uniting together, holding delegate and annual meetings is the course that must be taken'. The rank and files' goal should be to prepare themselves for 'the taking over of the means of life....each industry running its own affairs....production and distribution for workers by workers'.² The apathy on the part of the rank and file in the unions was also given as a reason for the failure of so many strikes to turn revolutionary. Leggatt stated that most strikes had failed 'due to the....want of energy on the part of the leaders', however, the membership were also guilty. Apart from demonstrating 'ignorance and apathy', in 'many cases [they] pay more attention to horse racing, football and drinking, than they do to social questions'.³ This resistance contradicted Anarcho-syndicalist theories of self-management, which called upon workers to participate and to control their own workplace. Leggatt's comments offer an example of the exasperation felt by many Anarchists when it came to mobilising the working-class for revolutionary action. As we have seen, this tended to contradict their stated faith in the ability of the workers to spontaneously effect change themselves.

¹ As we have seen, Leggatt was a leading official in the London Cab Drivers' Union. In 1913 this union was transmuted into the London and Provincial Union of Licensed Vehicle Workers, extending its recruitment into the bus and tram industries. Before the First World War, it earned the nickname the 'Red Button Union', because of the militancy and radical Syndicalist politics of activists like Leggatt. The latter was very prominent during the 1912 transport strikes in London. See Coates and Topham, Making of the Transport and General Workers, V. 1, part. 1, p. 93, and B. Holton, British Syndicalism: 1900-1914, (Pluto Press, London, 1976), p. 124.

² Commonweal, V. 6, n. 240, 16. Aug. 1890, p. 259 and V. 2, n. 20 (New Series), 20. Jan. 1894, p. 4.

³ The Torch, n. 8, (New Series), 18. Jan. 1895, p. 13.

The General Strike and Direct Action.

If the unions represented a possible basis for a new society, the general strike was the tool by which Anarchists hoped such a society would be brought about. During the 1890's it was the most consistent rebuttal to the charge that Anarchists were impractical dreamers. Despite the reservations of the purists¹, it was an accepted assumption that the strike was 'a perfectible weapon', capable of leading the workers 'to revolt against their taskmasters, and still on to the Universal Strike that shall put an end to the wage system itself'.² It was from his analysis of the labour unrest after 1889, that Malatesta concluded that 'the strike can and will probably be the starting point of the Social Revolution'. He argued that a general strike in one of the great industries, such as coal or the railways, along with the stoppages it would cause in dependent industries 'would draw into the struggle masses of people and could with comparative ease be converted into a revolution'. The state would not be able to repress such a movement straight away, as with an insurrection, and it would give people time to be gradually drawn into the movement and to become radicalised. For a strike to have the desired result though, it was necessary that 'the strikers, as the result of previous propaganda....be conscious of the goal to be obtained, understand the full import of the movement and consider themselves as men struggling not for a small private interest, but in the interest of the whole proletariat'. Malatesta recognised that for a strike to evolve into a revolution, the mass of people not involved in it had to be brought along, since they would not undergo shortages if they thought they had nothing to gain. Likewise there was always a large reserve of unemployed ready to replace those on strike. 'The strikers must understand this and conduct themselves so as to draw

¹ Nettlau, for example, thought that strikes 'were apt to kill individual initiative', a key theme in Anarchist activity. Samuels believed strikes were 'useless....with their term of semi-starvation, their weary struggles against the indifference of the workers who are not directly concerned and their miserable end of mediation and compromise'. Report by W. Wess and R. W. Burnie on The Revolutionary Conference at the Autonomie Club, 3. Aug. 1890, MSS 240/W/4/2. R. P. MRC, Warwick.

² *Freedom*, V. 4, n. 38, Jan. 1890, p. 43.

along with them the whole population including the blacklegs'. To ensure support, strikers should set about provisioning those not directly involved.¹

The need to involve the unemployed in any general strike was shared by Mowbray. The unions', he pointed out, were saying that unemployed men should not offer themselves for less than the union rate and otherwise did nothing for the unemployed, looking down on them in contempt. Meanwhile a largely ineffective policy of organising parades of the unemployed was going on outside the unions. When a drastic drop in union membership took place the unions' would bestir themselves, but only to the extent of holding discussions with vestries. This had the effect of demobilising an already weak unemployed agitation. What should be done, Mowbray said, was to immediately campaign round the following policy: Overtime should be stopped immediately; a day of eight hours or less should be enforced to absorb the unemployed and co-operative production should be started. Otherwise, said Mowbray it was the unions' fault if there was blacklegging. In some quarters these points were understood and modest attempts were made to implement them. For example, the busmen's union proposed that a few buses should be utilised 'for the unemployed and boycotted members'. This, it was hoped, would end the problem of scab labour, resulting in the success of any future general strike.²

Direct action was also urged upon the workers. During the miners strike of 1893 the Commonweal published articles from George Tallis, an Anarchist miner from Pendlebury in Lancashire. In these he made the suggestion that since the coal stocks held in reserve by the masters were their bargaining power, they should be fired. This point and the suggestion made by Turner that the local shops should be looted to feed the starving men were repeated in an Anarchist Manifesto to the Miners 'issued and circulated by the

¹ The Torch, n. 3 (New Series), Aug. 1894, p. 6-7.

² Commonweal, V. 2, n. 19 (New Series), 6. Jan. 1894, p. 3. At the 1895 TUC in Cardiff, Mowbray attempted to introduce this policy in a resolution which called for a general strike to achieve the eight hour day. Freedom, V. 9, n. 98, Oct. 1895, p. 45.

comrades in the mining districts'.¹ In July 1893 Samuels told the strikers that their representatives in the Commons could do little for them. 'They must act as the Homestead strikers acted, and defend the mines and trucks, against the masters and the forces that may be brought to bear'.²

The sorts of acts Samuels envisaged were described at a Trafalgar Square meeting on 17th September 1893, held to denounce the sending of armed police to the colliery districts. He urged the men 'to march in numbers to the nearest pit and "persuade" those who were working to throw down their tools, then with these others to march further and repeat the performance, varying the monotony by looting shops, or now and then causing the machinery of a pit to become useless or even playing games with rail, trucks and trolleys'.³ Such action, he was sure, would 'force matters to a satisfactory conclusion'. 'Of course', it would shock the union leaders, but this was to be expected. After the meeting, 'Mr Butcher drew the attention of the House to some incendiary remarks.....by a Mr H. Samuels, who speaking on the crisis in the coal trade advised the miners to imitate the young Jew Berkman who had shot Frick'.⁴ Whether or not this was realistic is debatable, but what is more important for us, is the consistency of these suggestions with both the French Syndicalism then developing, and the current of Syndicalist activism that later became important in Britain.⁵

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 11, (New Series), 16. Sept. 1893, p. 2. Among the Anarchists who visited Pendlebury to spread propaganda were Leggatt, Barton and MacDonald. See *Freedom*, V. 7, n. 80, Sept. 1893, p. 64.

² *Commonweal*, V. 1, n. 7, (New Series), 22. July. 1893. During the bloody Homestead Pennsylvania strike of 1892, Frick, the manager of the Carnegie Steel company had been shot by Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman. The striking men had previously been engaged in gun battles with the hired guards at the works. In August 1892 *Commonweal* had published an interview with Berkman in which he explained the motives behind the shooting. See V. 7, n. 327, 21. Aug. 1892

³ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 9, (New Series), 18. Aug. 1893. For similar views see Agresti's article 'Strike Tactics', *The Torch*, V. 1, (New Series), n. 11, April. 1895, p. 6-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 10, (New Series), 21. Sept. 1893.

⁵ Violence is of course a difficult indicator to use in support of any particular hypothesis about motivation. For some of the methodological problems in the use of violence as a social indicator see E. J. Hobsbawm 'Labour History and Ideology', in the *Journal of Social History*, V. 7, 1974, pp. 371-81. There is however significance evidence of violence directed at capitalist managers, plant and installations during the pre-war industrial unrest. In South Wales attacks were made on the homes of mine managers, as well as on pit-head installations. In Yorkshire, railway track was

A substantial number of Anarchists focused their activism on the world of labour in the period after the dock strike. This was in direct contrast to the period prior to 1889. Several Anarchists played a small, but influential role in trade unions as both leaders and members of the rank and file. In the years after 1889 these activists could be found voicing ideas on union democracy, federation, amalgamation, workers' control and the general strike. Although it is true that from about 1905 the British objective of rationalising union structure along Industrial Unionist and Syndicalist lines was 'derived from ideas and experiences drawn from, or acquired abroad', the above discussion has shown that most of the basic ideas of the pre-war Syndicalist movement can be found in the earlier publications of the Anarchists.¹ The activity of the Anarchist trade unionists demonstrates that proto-syndicalist aspirations, in one form or another, formed a continuous tradition amongst a minority of workers and that they played a part in laying the foundations for Syndicalism.

torn up and communication disrupted. In London, transport workers fought a revolver battle with blacklegs. In general terms such episodes show a marked similarity with the advocacy of sabotage and collective violence found in Anarchist publications during the 1890'. See Holton, British Syndicalism, pp. 81-2, 104-5, 121-3.

¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The "New Unionism" Reconsidered', in Mommsen and Husung (eds), The Development of Trades Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, p. 15.

Chapter Six. Anarchism and the World of Labour: Syndicalism

1900-1914

The incursion of Anarchist principles into the labour movement in France and the upsurge of industrial action at home in the years leading up to 1914, brought the focus of Anarchists back to the debates of the 1890's. Counting on the industrial workers to supply the manpower for the final upheaval, a growing number of Anarchists threw their weight behind the workers' struggles, hoping thereby, as in the 1890's, to steer them away from politics and towards direct action. By their insistence on such collective efforts, these advocates reinforced the path of Anarchism away from individual action to a more collective and organised confrontation with capitalism. We shall see that the Anarcho-syndicalists, as these activists became known, were more influential in Britain than earlier work on Syndicalism has suggested.¹

Syndicalism: A stunning new title for Anarchism?

In an article for Justice in 1913, John Maclean made some remarks about 'half-baked' Socialists becoming unbalanced by a new phase of 'anarchism under the stunning title of syndicalism'.² Edward Pease agreed, Syndicalism was 'a revival of old fashioned anarchism in a new form'.³ The Syndicalist case was, for many Social Democrats, certainly tainted by its closeness to Anarchism.⁴ The SDF insistence upon the intimate connection between Anarchism and Syndicalism seems to have been intended to give the Syndicalists a bad name by associating them with a disreputable doctrine.⁵ Yet their

¹ See for example B. Holton, British Syndicalism 1900-15, (Pluto Press, London, 1975). Although Holton recognises the early contribution made by the Anarchists in the 1900's, he neglects their later role in the pre-war labour unrest. See also J. White, 'Syndicalism in a Mature Industrial Setting: The case of Britain', in M. Van der Linden and M. Thorpe (eds), Revolutionary Syndicalism, (Scholar Press, London, 1990), pp. 101-118. Likewise Anarcho-syndicalism has been relatively neglected in theoretical discussions of the British movement. See B. Holton, 'Revolutionary Syndicalism and the British Labour Movement', in W. J. Mommsen and H. G. Husung (eds), The Development of Trades Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, 1880-1914, (Allen and Unwin, London, 1985).

² Justice, 14. Jan. 1913.

³ E. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society, (Cass and Co., London, 1963), pp. 229-30.

⁴ Justice, 27. April. 1912. In October 1912 the executive of the BSP published a statement damning Syndicalism and warning that 'those who denounce political action are anarchists excluded from the International'. Daily Herald, 31. Oct. 1912.

⁵ This was not lost on Anarchists. See for example J. Lane to A. Barker, 1. 4. 1912, List 333, Lane Collection, IISH. It was indeed a common belief that the Anarchists were the driving force

response to Syndicalism raises a more fundamental question. Was Syndicalism really a revival of Anarchism under a 'stunning new title'?

Syndicalism had much in common with Anarchist beliefs. The leading light of the *Fédération des Bourse du travail*, Fernand Pelloutier, declared that Syndicalism was the realisation of 'the federative principles formulated by Proudhon'.¹ Many Anarchists also saw the two ideologies as inseparable. Pierre Monatte explained that 'one would have to be blind not to see what there is in common between anarchism and syndicalism. Both seek to root out capitalism, the state, and wage system by means of the social revolution'.² The French Syndicalists were hostile to parliamentary action. They identified with their unions, not with parties and stressed direct action as the agency of emancipation.³ As Emile Pouget put it, 'the aim of the syndicates is to make war on the bosses and not to bother with politics'.⁴ Syndicalism, like Anarchism, also rejected the formulation of abstract theoretical schemes. Instead, it took the form of a 'generalised experience' closely geared to action. It did not pretend to include an integrated philosophy of history and economic analysis of capitalist development. Syndicalists and Anarchists were both impatient for

behind Syndicalism. Writing in 1913, the economist J. A. Estey recognised that: 'The impression spread by the prominence of such men in the labour organisations has been heightened by the anti-state campaign which has formed part of Syndicalist propaganda. It is not unnatural to infer that those who wish to destroy the state are Anarchists, and the enemies of Syndicalism, particularly among Socialists, have not been slow to identify one with the other'. J. A. Estey, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, (P. S King, London, 1913), p. 127.

¹ *Freedom*, V. 21, n. 224, Dec. 1907, p. 73. See also Guy Bowman's article 'The Old International', *The Syndicalist*, V. 2, n. 2, Feb. 1913, p. 3. Syndicalism received much inspiration from Anarchists like Pelloutier and the real beginning of the fame of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) was due to the entrance into that organisation of Anarchists like Paul Delesalle. Around 1895 the French Anarchists made a concerted effort to carry their message to the workers in the most direct way possible. Many Anarchists, noting the futility of terrorism, began to advocate the permeation of workers' organisations as a more effective means of propaganda. At the same time, others were realising the need to bridge the gap between libertarian ideals and organisational necessity. An influx into the unions followed, and by their devotion and industry Anarchists were soon able to exert an influence disproportionate to their numbers. See P. N. Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor*, (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1971) and B. Mitchell, *The Practical Revolutionaries: A New Interpretation of the French Anarcho-syndicalists*, (Greenwood, London, 1987).

² *International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam*, (*Freedom*, London, 1907), p. 15. See also Morrison Davidson's article in *The Syndicalist Railwayman*, V. 1, n. 1, Sept. 1911, p. 2.

³ See F. F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 172.

⁴ *Freedom*, V. 22, n. 226, Feb. 1908, p. 14.

action and placed much emphasis on the liberating experience of spontaneous and voluntarist action as a means of overthrowing capitalism.¹

There was clearly much in common between French Syndicalism and Anarchism. Yet it should not be assumed that the Anarchist tradition was the only formative influence on Syndicalism. Other forms of Syndicalism owed more to Marxism. This was especially true of the Industrial Unionism adopted by the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), formed in 1903 and named after De Leon's American organisation of the same name. The American SLP at first had a 'party centred' attitude to unions which had led to the formation of a separatist Socialist Trade and Labour Alliance. This was seen as a bulwark against, and a refuge from, corrupt and opportunist unions and their officials. The emphasis shifted, however, and a number of different groups began to give industrial organisation the first place and see Industrial Unionism not only as a transcendence of sectional unionism but as the basis of a new society. Industrial Unionism both organised the workers as a class and provided the form through which workers could control industry. Political power gained through elections represented only a rubber stamping of a position already gained by industrial action.² This shift in emphasis was backed by De Leon and so was its practical outcome, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), formed in 1905. The British SLP endorsed this shift from orthodox Social Democratic practice and took steps to set up their own Industrial Union. In the event a propaganda body, the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism (BAIU), was founded in January 1906.³ The Anarchists felt that the SLP's 'compromise between direct action and political intrigue' was still reformist and urged it to reject politics completely.⁴ Later on, dissidents within the AIU did in fact come to this

¹ Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, p. 170.

² Once the means of production had been seized by the unions, the parliamentary Socialists were to 'adjourn themselves on the spot'. See *The Industrial Unionist*, V. 1, n. 1, March, 1908, p. 36.

³ SLP Minutes, 21. Jan. 1906. Add. MS 52602, ff. 51-51. British Library Manuscript Room. In 1908 the BAIU published their own journal *The Industrial Unionist*.

⁴ *Voice of Labour*, V. 1, n. 25, 6. July, 1907, p. 136.

conclusion. For our purposes however, it is enough to note that Syndicalist ideas were not restricted to Anarchists, despite the claims of the Social Democrats.

Those who labelled Syndicalism as a new form of Anarchism also ignored the fact that many Anarchists rejected the 'crude simplicity' of Syndicalism. For them, Anarchism was more progressive in its concerns than simply a pre-occupation with the industrial world. They argued that Syndicalism with its emphasis on proletarian class struggle, was an 'ultra-labourist' ideology which had too narrow a vision of a free society.¹ Malatesta argued that in contrast, Anarchism sought to liberate everyone. 'The revolution which we desire far exceeds the interests of a single class: it proposes the complete liberation of enslaved humanity'.² The Syndicalists were seeking an illusory economic solidarity instead of a real solidarity. Syndicalism considered humans as producers, and as an adjunct to the factory. For Anarchists however, work was not the only point of reference.³ The productivist and, in consequence, masculinist leanings of Syndicalism, explain why the Anarcho-feminists also reacted against any association of Anarchism with Syndicalism.⁴

Malatesta argued that Syndicalists, in their concentration on the world of work, could become entangled in struggles for better wages and conditions, in the same way as any reformist union. To be effective in their struggle the unions had to work towards establishing themselves as permanent organisations. Despite what Syndicalists proclaimed, the desire for permanence would give unions civil personalities, interests and regulations needing to be defended. Syndicalism contained 'by the very nature of its function, all the elements of bureaucratic degeneration which have corrupted movements in the past'. The

¹ *Freedom*, V. 28, n. 308, Dec. 1914, p. 95 and V. 28, n. 305, Sept. 1914, p. 66.

² *The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam August 1907*, (Freedom, London, 1907), p. 16. See also M. Nettelau to T. Keell, 9. May. 1914, Freedom Archive, File 4, IISH.

³ G. Barrett, *The Anarchist Revolution*, (Bristol Workers' Freedom Group, Haymarket, Bristol, 1915), p. 13. Kropotkin did not identify Syndicalism with Anarchism either. In a letter to Grave in 1907 he voiced his reservations about the vision of a society narrowly based on workers' organisations. See P. Kropotkin to J. Grave, 3. July. 1907, N. C., IISH.

⁴ See for example *The Freewoman*, V. 1, n. 19, 28. March. 1912, pp. 365-7.

very act of being constituted by law forced the unions to become part of the legal power structure. Syndicalism and Anarchism constituted negations of each other:

syndicalist action involves us in certain perils, [especially] the acceptance by the militant of office, particularly when it is paid office....the anarchist who becomes an....official....is lost to propaganda, lost to anarchism! Hence forward he is under obligation to those who pay him and, since these are not all anarchists, the salaried official - placed between his conscience and his interest - must either follow his conscience and lose his position, or follow his interest - and then, goodbye to anarchism!¹

The position of the militant was also threatened by other factors. Since the unions were compelled to widen their membership as far as possible with the object of achieving 100 per cent organisation, the militant minority would become swamped by the non-militant majority, with the result that, even if the leadership remained in radical hands, the revolutionary programme would have to be toned down.²

The importance of the Syndicalist message was acknowledged by Anarchists, but it was 'insufficient in itself to manage the revolution'.³ Malatesta represented the attitude of the Anarcho-communists when he contended that a 'purely economic struggle is not sufficient; it must be based on an intense moral struggle; for changes in economic conditions soon readjust themselves where the moral conditions of the people remain unaffected'.⁴ Malatesta always favoured 'the most active participation in the working-class movement', but did so:

¹ The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam August 1907, (Freedom, London, 1907), p. 18.

² Freedom, V. 19, n. 223, Nov. 1907, p. 65-6. This was what actually happened to the CGT and Nettelau argued that British Syndicalism would follow the same reformist path. 'The development of French Syndicalism is somewhat ahead of that of English Syndicalism - in the sense that the same furious war that Larkin etc. conducted against English trade unionism is being waged here (in Paris) against the very first lights....of revolutionary Syndicalism. You see at a glance what that means - officials are the same everywhere and undergo the same evolution backwards. Syndicalism or trade unionism is only one and cannot be twofold - there is no revolutionary organisation all white with angels as officials who do nothing but improve and evolve to higher spheres - and black old-fashioned trade unions with wire pullers at the head who get but blacker and can but decay or become fossilised - this separation holds good on paper - in practical life men are the same everywhere and powers of routine degrade them everywhere in the same way'. In Paris, stressed Nettelau, Anarchist writers were now criticising the CGT leadership where once they had been among their greatest admirers. M. Nettelau to T. Keell, 25. March. 1914, Freedom Archive, File 4, IISH.

³ Freedom, V. 22, n. 233, Sept. 1907.

⁴ Ibid., V. 22, n. 235, Nov. 1907.

in the interests of our propaganda whose scope will be greatly widened. But in no way should that participation be considered as a renunciation of our most cherished ideas. Within the syndicates we must remain Anarchists...The working class movement...is no more than a means - though doubtless it is the best of all the means available to us. But I refuse to take that means as an end, and in the same way I would not want us to lose sight of the totality of anarchist conceptions, or, to put it simply, our other means of agitation.¹

For Malatesta Anarchism was not equivalent to Syndicalism. If it were he argued, then Syndicalism was indeed merely a new and confusing term. In fact, however, it was not; only certain Syndicalist ideas were anarchistic; others were clearly authoritarian.

Many Anarchists were certainly concerned about the centralising language of the class struggle and the emphasis on discipline which could be found in Syndicalist literature. Through its use of terms like 'rank and file' and 'general staff', it seemed that to be successful, Syndicalist methods necessitated military-style and authoritarian leadership. Some justification for this belief that Syndicalist action would entail less rather than more democracy could be found in Syndicalist writings. In an article on 'The Miner's Hope', W. F. Hay devoted a section to what he called 'Our Conception of Democracy': 'Our leaders must be elected by a ballot of the membership by direct vote, elected for a definite period with definite instructions, and they must prove their competency by being successful'. This had the right emphasis on directness and accountability, but a few sentences later, Hay made the explicit parallel with military command: 'Our democracy must be expressed in determining the object to be fought for, who shall lead in the fight, and what is a reasonable period to expect victory. For the rest, no General can consult with his troops when going into battle with the enemy. So with us'.² There had been many complaints among

¹ The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam August 1907, (Freedom, London, 1907), p. 18.

² The Industrial Syndicalist, n. 5, Nov. 1911, pp. 22-3. See also Archie Hamilton's demand that the TUC form a 'war department' to direct the operations of labour. Solidarity, V. 1, n. 9, June-July, 1913, p. 3. For many militants, if not the leadership of the respective unions, the formation of the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers in 1914 seemed to point strongly in the direction of a general staff for labour who would direct strategic operations in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. See G. A. Philips, 'The Triple Industrial Alliance in 1914', Economic History Review, V. 24, n. 2, 1971, pp. 55-67.

Anarchists that politicians tried to assume general-like roles, tried to avoid discussion of strategy and in general concentrated power in their own hands. Would Anarchist critics of leadership really be prepared to adopt methods which enhanced the authority of leaders, even when democratically elected and subject to recall and even as a precondition of Syndicalist success?

The Syndicalists often advocated Trades Councils and Industrial Unions as the basic structure and 'supreme authority of society'.¹ Anarchists argued however, that such organisations reflected the structure of a society that they was formed to combat, the result of historical developments and capitalist domination. Malatesta maintained that a new society could not be built without abolishing such structures and called instead for new organisms reflecting the changed situation. Each occupation had its own union and the interests of workers in that industry may not necessarily be the same as those elsewhere. Union organisation could thus become a means by which the interests of one group were advanced at the expense of another.² Again, the organisational structure of the syndicates was not appropriate to a society where production would be based on need not profit. Some industries would disappear, others would be reorganised to allow workers to move between jobs and develop their skills. Thus the syndicates had to disappear along with the society in which they originated. If not they could become a force of stagnation or the begetters of a new form of authority, even the state. Thus the 'final aim of the IWW in the future society [should] be to disappear as an organisation and leave full room for the initiative of its free-minded members', otherwise it could degenerate into a 'Industrialist despotism' or 'state organisation'.³

To some Anarchists it did look as though the Syndicalists were intent on establishing a new form of authority. If the Anarchists desired the destruction of the state,

¹ *The Syndicalist*, V. 1, n. 11, Dec. 1912.

² *Freedom*, V. 23, n. 242, June. 1909, p. 44.

³ *Ibid.*, V. 23, n. 246, Oct. 1906, p. 77.

it was because they objected to the state and to government as such. It was not hostility to a particular form of government, it was hostility to any form of government. The Syndicalists also desired to abolish the state, but they opposed the state not because all government was objectionable, but because the particular form of government in capitalist society was incompatible with the economic society which they proposed to introduce.¹ From an Anarchist perspective there was as much reason to fear government by unions as there was to fear government by capitalists. It was for this reason that W. C. Owen opposed any identification of Anarchism with Syndicalism, declaring: 'I cannot regard the compulsions of Syndicalism, and similar states-within-states, as....wombs in which the society of the future is being moulded. Such analogies seem to me fatally misleading'.²

The Syndicalists implied that their chief weapon, the general strike, would in time evolve into a revolution, yet the necessary conditions and mechanics of this were not spelt out in any detail. Malatesta felt that the general strike was fraught with problems. If everyone stopped work, there would not be enough supplies to meet the people's needs. Rather than starving the bourgeoisie, the first to starve during a general strike would be the workers. The answer was not therefore to down tools, but to occupy the factories and to increase production. Above all, the general strike could be no substitute for insurrection. As soon as the workers tried to gain possession of the 'fruits of production' they would be opposed by 'soldiers, police, the bourgeoisie themselves, and then the question will have to be resolved. It will be insurrection, and victory will go to the strongest'.³

¹ The Industrial League for example remarked that: 'The Syndicalists are accused of creating a state within a state. Quite so. We intend to build up our workers' organisation to destroy the oppressive state of our masters. There will not be a state within the state for long; the state of the capitalists must go'. Instead the unions were to be the 'administrative machinery of the industrial commonwealth'. *The Industrialist*, V. 1, n. 3, Aug. 1908, p. 5.

² W. C. Owen, *Anarchism Versus Socialism*, (Freedom Press, London, 1904), p. 29.

³ *The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam August 1907*, (Freedom, London, 1907), p. 20. Malatesta's view of the general strike had changed. In the 1890's he had adopted it as the most likely way forward. His observation of the 1905 general strike in Russia however, led to a reassessment. It is also worth noting that Malatesta's view of the general strike was, in some ways, similar to that of George Sorel, who deemed it important solely as an essential myth of Socialism: a body of images capable of evoking instinctively the people's enthusiasm for the

Reflecting this concern for a wider ranging form of Anarchism than its Syndicalist variety, Freedom continued to appeal to a wider spectrum of potential converts, and advocated more variegated methods of action.¹ Overtones of mistrust of collective and organised warfare persisted. Those more inclined to support the individualist tendency in Anarchism attacked Syndicalism for not attaching enough significance to the quest for freedom and claimed that it could even be 'the graveyard of anarchism'.² For these Anarchists it was still the individual who was 'directly responsible for the existence of government' and it was individual change that would 'help to break the spell of authority'.³ What was important to these libertarians was to keep alive the spirit of revolt and not to be bound by any one solution.

It is clear therefore that while Anarchism and Syndicalism shared much in common, the Social Democratic argument that they were the same was false. Nevertheless, despite the misgivings of some, the majority of Anarchists embraced Syndicalism positively, believing that it 'would establish an intermediate system on the road to Anarchism'.⁴ Although no definite policy on Syndicalism was formulated by the Anarchists, at a 1914 conference 'it was agreed that industrial action was necessary, and this action and with it our own thoughts, could best be expressed by adopting the syndicalist method of warfare, thus helping the workmen to put aside their faith in leaders'.⁵

Involvement in Syndicalism gave Anarchism 'a new lease of life' and made it a more 'effective and formidable force in practical politics'.⁶ Indeed, the underlying assumption for those Anarchists who embraced Syndicalism was that it would increase the

struggle. The strike, he wrote, was meant to 'create an epic state of mind' and in turn, violent insurrection. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, (Macmillan, London, 1969), p. 145.

¹ Freedom, V. 23, n. 237, Jan. 1909, p. 2.

² M. Nettelau to T. Keell, 4. June. 1906, N. C, IISH. See also M. Nettelau, MSS Notebook, 22. July. 1915, List 277, NC, IISH, p. 228.

³ Freedom, V. 22, n. 234, Oct. 1908, p. 58.

⁴ M. Nettelau to T. Keell, 8. Jan. 1914, Freedom Archive, File 4, IISH.

⁵ Freedom, V. 28, n. 301, May. 1914, p. 37.

⁶ J. Joll, The Anarchists, (Methuen and Co. London, 1979), p. 188.

relevance of Anarchism for the workers.¹ Yet it is worth stressing that although the Anarchists may have been the most militant members of industrial organisations, most of the workers involved were seeking the best kind of life they could find in the here and now, and for this reason even the Syndicalist groups shared with ordinary unions a stability and centralisation of structure which was never encountered among purely Anarchist groups. The Anarchist purist was an individualist working with other individualists; the Anarcho-syndicalists were organisers working with the masses. In their own way they developed an organisational outlook, which made them more capable of carrying out elaborate plans and of keeping complex associations operating. Anarcho-syndicalism, needed stable organisations and succeeded in creating them precisely because it moved in a world that was only partly governed by Anarchist ideals, because it had to consider and make compromises with the day to day situation of labour, because it had to maintain the allegiance of large numbers of workers who were only remotely conscious of the final aim of Anarchism. The formation of Syndicalist organisations, even those with an Anarchist tinge, was not a true triumph of Anarchism; it was rather a reflection of a period in which Anarchists learnt to compromise.

Early Anarcho-syndicalist Interventions.

Anarcho-syndicalists were the first to introduce the ideas of the French Syndicalists to a wider audience in Britain. Something of the French movement began to filter into Anarchist propaganda at the turn of the century. Occasional articles appeared in Freedom which showed a French influence without necessarily making any great effort to adapt the theory to British practice.² The propaganda remained general: 'In every factory

¹ See Freedom, V. 29, n. 317, Sept. 1915, p. 70.

² See for example Kropotkin's article 'Anarchists and Trade Unions, translated from Les Temps Nouveaux, which stressed that 'French Syndicalism differs from English Trades Unionism in its revolutionary character. It considers the syndicate as the arm of the social revolution and the cell of the future communist society'. Freedom, V. 19, n. 196, June. 1905. In 1901 the Anarchists had already established the International Workingmen's Group in London which declared 'its solidarity with the General Federation of French workers [CGT] and will use all its efforts to aid and develop its aims'. Ibid., V. 15, n. 160, Sept. 1901, p. 47.

toil the men we wish to educate. We do not seek their votes; we ask them to think and to act, to unite and to organise, and to use the weapon they have in their own hands...the General Strike.¹ Yet, Anarchists were talking over the problems which were to become a concern later on. Of unions in London it was said in 1901 that they were either too small and ineffective or too big. In the latter case the result was branch apathy and 'uncontrolled officialism'. The activity of Social Democrats, which involved capturing positions in the unions, then using them as a base for a political career, was said to be undermining the ability of the unions to fight economic battles. It was also argued that the unions should be democratised, that all 'branches should preserve their autonomy' and that 'dependence on leaders be discouraged'.²

This submerged stream of thought was augmented by Sam Mainwaring and Tarrida del Marmol, who launched The General Strike in September 1903.³ Mainwaring, a member of the London Trades Council for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), used his experience to give a detailed analysis of officialism in the unions. This was in the context of unofficial action on the Clyde which was crushed because the engineering officials would not allow strike pay.⁴ As an attempt to apply French thinking to British conditions the journal was a brave start. However, 1904 was a year of high unemployment, particularly in engineering, and Mainwaring had to leave London for Swansea in search of work. There was no one prepared to carry on the paper and only a few issues were published. However, Mainwaring became an important activist in Wales, where he founded the Swansea Socialist Society in Landore. Landore was one direction from which Anarcho-syndicalist ideas reached the mining villages of the upper Swansea Valley.

¹ Ibid., V. 14, n. 147, Aug. 1900.

² Ibid., V. 15, n. 158, July. 1901, p. 32, V. 16, n. 168, June. 1902, p. 168.

³ S. Mainwaring to T. Keell, 6. Dec. 1903, Freedom Archive, Correspondence 1, H-Z, IISH. Albert Meltzer maintained that Mainwaring invented the term 'Anarcho-syndicalism' during these years. A. Meltzer, The Anarchists in London 1935-55, (Cienfuegos Press, Sanday, Orkney, 1976), p. 9. When Meltzer was interviewed in 1979 he said that Emma Goldman had told him so. K. John, 'Sam Mainwaring and the Autonomist Tradition', in Llafur, V. 4, n. 3, 1986, p. 62.

⁴ The General Strike, V. 1, n. 1, Sept. 1903, p. 2.

Indeed, it should be stressed that Syndicalism did not arrive in the Swansea Valley with The Miners' Next Step in 1912, but with the arrival of Spanish workers after 1900. They were brought in in order to undercut wages. However, this exercise was ill-conceived, for many of them were Anarcho-syndicalists.¹ They had come to Wales after being victimised for union activity in Spain. It was reported that they were: 'devoted to trade union principles, and strong in the belief that the workers' first duty is to combine, joined the Workers' Union'.² In 1906 Melchor Esteban, one of the leaders of the Spanish community, made an appeal for international solidarity in the face of those who accused the immigrants of taking jobs. 'Fellow workers....do not besmirch the reputation of the Welsh collier for love of freedom and readiness to harbour the oppressed'.³ The process of their acceptance was eventually accelerated by recognition of their union consciousness, and some, including Anarcho-syndicalists like Esteban and Victoriano Lafuente, became active lodge committeemen in the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF). The militant miners' leaders who emerged after 1918, acknowledged that they originally acquired many of their ideas from the presence of the Spanish Anarcho-syndicalists.⁴

In 1904 Anarcho-syndicalists were also active in Scotland. They put forward a successful motion at Paisley Trades Council which called upon the unions to recognise 'the necessity of being affiliated to the General Federation of Trade Unions, and [of] coming

¹ Freedom first mentioned the Spanish workers in June 1901 in the context of a visit to them by Tarrida del Marmol and Sam Mainwaring. See Freedom, V. 15, n. 158, June. 1901, p. 23. William Mainwaring told Nettlau that he went with his father 'to Dowlais where there was trouble between the Spaniards and locals and heard both of them put the matter straight - my father speaking in Welsh and English; Marmol in Spanish and English'. W. Mainwaring to M. Nettlau, 6. May. 1925, List 196, NC, IISH.

² Freedom, V. 15, n. 161, Sept. 1901, p. 48.

³ Western Mail, 20. July. 1906. Later on Esteban wrote to Kcell of Freedom asking him to write an open letter to the miners in order to end the anti-alien agitation then occurring. Esteban pointed out that many of the Spaniards were 'victims of Spanish capitalism' and 'had distinguished themselves as heroes of the labour cause in Spain'. M. Esteban to T. Kcell, 8. Sept. 1906, Freedom Archive, Correspondence 1, A-G, IISH. In 1917 Esteban was the secretary of the Committee of Lovers of Spanish Liberty, a group organised to foster links between British trade unionists and the Spanish CNT. In the October 1917 issue of Freedom he appealed for money to aid the CNT which was then engaged in a general strike. Freedom, V. 31, n. 341, Oct. 1917, p. 51.

⁴ H. Francis and D. Smith, The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980), pp. 11-13.

into line with nearly all the unions in France....which stand on the basis of the General Strike'.¹ The Dundee Anarchists were also working on the project of forming 'a labour union on Libertarian lines'.² Such a union did not come into existence, yet in 1907 the Dundee Anarchists were trying to reform the jute workers' union on federalist lines. In Leeds attempts were being made to form an 'International Revolutionary Labour Union' in May 1906, its object being 'to obtain Labour's immediate demands without resorting to politics'. The union also dispensed with paid officials.³ Nothing more was heard of this experiment, although it may have been of some importance among Jewish workers. These unsuccessful beginnings are important because they demonstrate the direction in which Anarchist ideas were running. While their impact was limited, they did help generate a group of organisers who would later gain prominence.

These early interventions were doomed to failure given the wider background. The Taff Vale decision of 1901 ensured that trade unionists were more inclined towards labour representation than to any theory that rejected politics.⁴ It should also be stressed that Anarcho-syndicalist ideas were unlikely to find support during an era in which union bargaining power was reduced by depression. Unemployment was growing at this time, while the employers' self-confidence steadily increased as did their stubbornness in the face of demands.⁵ Yet despite these conditions, important preparatory work had been done. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas were being absorbed. They needed time and changing conditions to bear fruit.

By 1907 conditions were changing. For many Socialist activists, the great things hoped for from Labour had turned out to be a false dawn. Reacting to the influence of the reformist unions, the leadership of the party avoided an explicit Socialist formulation of

¹ *Freedom*, V. 18, n. 190, Aug. 1904, p. 32.

² *Ibid.*, V. 18, n. 192, Oct. 1904, p. 40.

³ *Ibid.*, V. 20, n. 207, June. 1906, p. 19.

⁴ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, (Penguin, London, 1971), pp. 123-5

⁵ H. A. Clegg, A. Fox and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889*, V. 1: 1889-1910, (Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 489.

aims, preferring to stress the need to maximise immediate economic returns, but in reality it was hardly instrumental in bringing them about. Labour's poor performance increased the growing disillusionment with it and with parliamentarism. In the conformist behaviour of Labour MP's revolutionaries had, they believed, an example of the muffling effect of parliament.¹ As one activist remarked: 'organised labour is getting sick of parliamentary piffle....the struggle must through force of circumstances come back to the economic plane'.² Syndicalist propaganda now appeared more relevant. Depression and unemployment was to hold back discontent temporarily, but by 1911 the economy was booming and unemployment low. This encouraged a rise in union membership, steady after 1905 and rapid after 1911. At the same time the union leaderships were absorbed in parliamentary manoeuvrings and were nervous of spoiling Labour's electoral image. The rapidly developing discontent amongst the rank and file therefore found itself in opposition to parliamentary action as the solution to their problems and found itself frustrated by a cautious bureaucracy that emerged in the difficult period of the 1890's. Thus the period from 1906 to the explosions of 1910 was an important one of preparation in an atmosphere of deepening bitterness.

In 1907 Anarcho-syndicalism re-established itself with a new initiative led by John Turner, a union official aware of the new mood among elements of the working-class. He persuaded the Freedom group to launch an Anarcho-syndicalist journal, the Voice of Labour, which ran from January 1907. Turner outlined its policy: 'Direct Action....is what we stand for...we shall insist that nothing is gained without activity in organisation, in agitation, in the strike in all its forms and that only by these means will the workers in the

¹ Even the moderate Reformers Hand Book for 1907 had harsh words for the Labour representatives: 'their half measures have pleased nobody....On many matters both legislative and administrative they have exhibited an almost incredible political cowardice'. Likewise the Liverpool Anarcho-syndicalists concluded that the 'Labour members have succumbed to the sleeping sickness which attacks all parties which enter the House of Commons, and their policy is now indistinguishable from that of Liberalism. The workingmen ought to take this lesson to heart'. Handbill of The General Strike Socialist Group, Oct. 1908, List 310, NC, IISH.

² G. Aldred to T. Keell, Aug. 1905, Freedom Archive, Correspondence 1, A-G, IISH.

end be able to claim their own'.¹ This activity was counterpoised to parliamentary passivity. Turner as editor, argued that the eclipse of an aggressive spirit among the unions was a product of their incorporation into Parliament. 'A blight of respectability' had, he believed, fallen upon officials who now envisaged a political career. To end this 'political adventurism' he called for propaganda within existing unions in order to overcome sectionalism and self-interest.²

Yet, despite the fact that the paper was well written and the coverage of strikes in Britain and abroad was full and relevant, there were developing contradictions.³ The direct action talked of by Turner was action instigated and directed by the official structures of the unions.⁴ His propaganda was directed towards trade unionists and was designed to encourage them to fight directly for gains in wages and conditions rather than allowing Parliament to mediate these demands.⁵ Even here however, Turner was prepared to compromise. For example, his union, the Shop Assistants, was committed to abolishing the 'living in' system, where employees not only lost a job if they were sacked, but also a roof over their heads.⁶ This commitment was being followed through with some success by industrial action, but at the same time the Shop Assistants Union sponsored MP, was pressing for legislation to make the living in system non-compulsory. Turner's comment was only that industrial action might well succeed before the Bill was made law.⁷ When challenged by Keell, and asked if this was consistent with his condemnation of the Social

¹ *Voice of Labour*, V. 1, n. 1, 26. Jan. 1907.

² *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 2, 2. Feb. 1907, p. 20.

³ See for example the articles on 'French Syndicalism', *Voice of Labour*, V. 1, n. 24, 29. June, 1907, p. 131 and n. 25, 6. July, 1907, p. 134 and Karl Walter's report on the 'First Italian Syndicalist Congress', *Voice of Labour*, V. 1, n. 26, 13. July, 1907, p. 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25. Jan. 1907, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 3, 2. Feb. 1907, p. 20. Turner himself had turned down an offer of Parliamentary candidature from his union in 1903 on the grounds that it would be a waste of the union's money and of his time. Instead he preferred to concentrate on 'organising the assistants so that they may have the power to help themselves'. J. Turner to Secretary of the Shop Assistants Union, 11. July, 1903, Freedom Correspondence, H-Z, IISH.

⁶ For an account of this dispute in London and Turner's role in it see *Voice of Labour*, V. 1, n. 27, 20. July, 1907, p. 142.

⁷ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 4, 9. Feb. 1907. At the 1909 TUC Turner also seconded a resolution in favour of a Bill for the compulsory closing of shops.

Democrats for their 'middle class politics', Turner said that 'he did not make a fetish of Anarchism and was not going to be dictated to by pedants!'.¹ Turner therefore stood for militant unionism, but he was prepared to countenance parliamentary action if it had any prospect of success. Turner's possibilist outlook eventually led to what other Anarchists saw as a thoroughly reformist outlook.² Indeed, his experience resembles the path taken by the leaders of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). They had all started as Anarchists; but their experience of organisation in a democratic state made them move a long way towards coming to terms with existing society and obliged them to temper their radicalism with a considerable amount of practical reformist action.³

What Turner did not come to terms with was the rising tide of anti-officialism. When revolts against the officials took place it was his opinion that it was because they were not doing their job.⁴ It does not seem to have occurred to him that the question which was increasingly put was: who should control the unions, the officials or the members? Militant leadership, like Turner's, might reduce tensions, but it could not always abolish the growing horizontal split in many unions. Other contributors to the Voice of Labour differed from Turner in this respect. Carlyle Potter was adamant that 'selling the principles of Trade Unionism has become the common practice of officials...[workers] can only depend upon the unity of their workmates'.⁵ Much can be explained by Turner's

¹ T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 25. Feb. 1907, NC, IISH.

² See for example A. A. Davies to M. Nettleau, 12. Aug. 1907., NC, IISH. Later on Turner was denounced by Jack Tanner for participating in a body formed 'to establish friendly links between employers and workers'. This was the Industrial League and Council which met under the chairmanship of Viscount Burnham, proprietor of the Daily Telegraph. 'Turner', wrote Tanner, professes to be an anarchist....If so, is it in accordance with anarchist doctrines to become a member of a council for promoting harmonious relations between employers and employed?'. Solidarity, V. 4, n. 8, Aug. 1920, p. 1.

³ See for example, N. Papayanis, Alphonse Merrheim: The Emergence of Reformism in Revolutionary Syndicalism 1871-1925, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Lancaster, 1985).

⁴ Turner for example attacked the officials of the GFTU for concerning themselves with politics and instead called on them to push the union onto a revolutionary path embracing direct action. He never attacked the officials on the basis of whether or not they had any right to control the union, only on the policies they were advocating. Voice of Labour, V. 1, n. 2, 25. Jan. 1907, p. 12.

⁵ Ibid., V. 1, n. 6, Feb. 23, 1907, p. 2.

experiences. As we have seen, by 1907 he had become an official of some importance. In July 1907 his union, the NUSAWC had over 22,000 members.¹ Yet in 1906 the union's executive was being seen in some quarters as a bureaucratic interference with local initiative. Complaints were to grow and by 1909 Turner was accused of being 'one of the most blatant reactionaries with which trade unionism was ever cursed'.² Therefore, although he was, theoretically an Anarchist, his official position made him a somewhat anomalous editor of a paper preaching direct action.

The paper contained other contradictions. As we have seen, Turner sought to revolutionise the existing unions. In contrast, Guy Aldred, whom Turner had asked to help in publishing the paper, felt that the existing unions, based upon friendly society functions and craft organisation were incapable of transformation into revolutionary bodies. He wished instead to consign them 'to the vortex of oblivion' through the development of entirely new industrial unions, organised on 'a class-conscious basis irrespective of their professions'.³ To this end he established the Industrial Union of Direct Actionists (IUDA) in May 1907. Aldred conceded that the IUDA was 'not unlike the IWW'. But 'the IUDA, not content with preaching the class war, affirms the hopelessness of political action'.⁴ (This was before the IWW split). The IUDA's basis of support was in London, Liverpool and Leeds.⁵ Among the London organisations that affiliated was the International Union of

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 25, 6. July. 1907, p. 136.

² The Industrial League published an attack on Turner and the rest of the Executive Committee of the Shop Assistants union, accusing them of authoritarian behaviour after they had refused to meet a delegation of workers at the unions head office. The EC had called in the police to remove the workers delegation. Accusations against Turner's authoritarian leadership were furthered when the IL published correspondence from members of the union who were in dispute with the executive after several North London branches had tried to establish their own district council and were refused recognition. *The Industrialist*, V. 2, n. 17, Oct. 1909, p. 4 and V. 2, n. 18, Nov. 1909, p. 1. See also E. J. B. Allen, *Revolutionary Unionism*, (London, 1909), particularly the section entitled 'The Treachery of Officials'. The executive for its part accused the district council of trying to supplant its own authority. *The Shop Assistant*, 2. Oct. 1909.

³ G. Aldred, *The Logic and Economics of the Class Struggle*, (Bakunin Press, London, 1907), p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 22, 15. June. 1907, p. 124

⁵ There were six groups in London, at Clerkenwell, Lambeth, Plaistow, Walthamstow, Walworth and Whitechapel. There were also branches in Dover and Weston-Super-Mare.

Bakers and Confectioners.¹ The IUDA however, was largely ineffective and despite its grand title did not alter the situation materially. However, it did, in its explicit focus on the economic plane, precede the 1908 split in the IWW, when the anti-political faction broke away from the De Leonist wing.

The Voice of Labour ceased publication in September 1907. The reasons given were financial, but there was more to it than that. Aldred could not but be aware of Turner's position as an official and the hostility towards such people in Industrial Unionist material. The SLP for example, did not even allow officials to join the party.² The Voice itself contained articles from IUDA supporters pouring scorn on officials.³ On returning from a propaganda campaign to Liverpool in August 1907, Aldred quarrelled with Turner and left to establish his own paper. The occasion was a shop assistants' strike in Kentish Town when Aldred refused 'to write an article....booming Turner's conduct....when we knew he was acting treacherously towards the parties concerned and sending Anarchism to the devil into the bargain'.⁴ He accused the Freedom Anarcho-syndicalists of promoting reformist union activity under the control of the established leaders. The Voice of Labour collapsed through internal dissension as much as lack of funds.

Despite the absence of a popular Anarcho-syndicalist organ after the paper's demise, Anarchist interest in Syndicalism continued to grow. British Anarchists attended the Anarcho-syndicalist meetings at the 1907 Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam.⁵ Karl Walter, for example, attended a meeting at which the possibility of organising a Syndicalist international was discussed. The British 'did their best to turn this meeting into a discussion of Syndicalist theory'.⁶ The congress also established an International Bureau

¹ Voice of Labour, V. 1, n. 20, 1. June. 1907, p. 115.

² SLP Minutes, 22. Oct. 1904. Add. MS 52602. f. 31. British Library Manuscript Room.

³ See for example Carlyle Potter's article in the Voice of Labour, V. 1, n. 21. Sept. 1907, p. 179.

⁴ Herald of Revolt, V. 2, n. 6, June. 1912, p. 51. See also G. Aldred, Dogmas Discarded (Bakunin Press, London, 1913), p. 15.

⁵ Pierre Monatte took the lead at the congress in defending Syndicalist principles and Malatesta in challenging them. See The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam August 1907. (Freedom, London, 1907), pp. 15-20.

⁶ K. Walter to T. Keell, 28. Aug. 1907, Freedom Archive, Correspondence 1, H-Z, IISH.

which was to be based in London. Alexander Schapiro was elected as its manager. He also edited the bureau's Bulletin de l'Internationale Anarchiste between 1908 and 1910, which published Syndicalist propaganda.¹ The congress reinforced the momentum toward the establishment of Syndicalist organisations in many countries, Britain included. It concluded that 'the expropriation and the collective control of the instruments and products of labour can only be undertaken by the workers themselves [and that] 'trade unions....are the germs of the society of the future'. Accordingly, the congress called upon Anarchists to 'take an active part in the autonomous movement of the working class'.² The Liverpool Anarcho-syndicalists responded and 'set themselves the task of building up an industrial organisation as opposed to the present sectional unions'.³

As we have seen, Turner had tried to adapt French Syndicalism to orthodox British trade unionism. There were anomalies in his position yet it was the one largely taken by Tom Mann later on and represented one aspect of the upsurge. A persistently grumbling anti-officialism was more audible in Industrial Unionist quarters. Here too there had been adaptations to British conditions. The SLP had formed the BAIU in 1907 which was as far as they felt able to go in forming an organisation on the pattern of the IWW. The membership of the BAIU included members who believed in parliamentary action and those - including many Anarcho-syndicalists - who did not.⁴ When the IWW split in 1908 on the question of political action, a split also developed within the BAIU.⁵ In August 1908

¹ W. Thorpe, The Workers Themselves: Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913-1923, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, London, 1989), p. 292. The congress also gave rise to the more durable Bulletin International du Mouvement Syndicaliste, edited by the Dutch Anarcho-syndicalist, Christian Cornelissen who was then living in London.

² Voice of Labour, V. 1, n. , 21. Sept. 1907, p. 179.

³ Freedom, V. 22, n. 232, Aug. 1908, p. 74. Discussions were being held with dissident SDP members and met with an enthusiastic response. Yet the experiment foundered, whether because of the militant anti-parliamentary attitudes of the Anarcho-syndicalists or because of nervousness of losing initiative on the part of the other groups involved. It was a successful propaganda exercise, however, since the questions of Syndicalism had been discussed for several months. The Liverpool Direct Action Group, as the remnants of these meetings became known as, continued their propaganda for a long time after.

⁴ The Industrial Unionist, V.1, n. 1, March. 1908, p. 1.

⁵ From its formation in 1905 two currents ran through the IWW. On the one hand, the Anarchists considered the IWW was all sufficient and were against introducing politics into the union. On

the Anarcho-syndicalist members were expelled after trying to 'pervert its theories'. The charters of the Battersea, Woolwich and Aberdeen branches were revoked because of their Anarchist tendencies.¹

This Anarcho-syndicalist faction, with whom EJB Allen (the original editor of the BAIU's organ The Industrial Unionist) was co-operating, had already helped set up a dissident paper in June 1908 called The Industrialist. Its anti-parliamentarism at this point was pragmatic and represented a reading of De Leonism in conflict with the De Leonists. Since economic power preceded political power for the bourgeoisie, the argument ran, this must be the case for the working-class. Economic power for the working-class 'consists in their unity and organisation on class lines in the workshops'.² Until this was achieved there was no point in parliamentary action. This was basically the same conclusion that Aldred had come to the year before when he had formed the IUDA. Unlike Aldred, however, many of the dissidents around Allen had also come to reject the dual unionist strategy which they felt isolated revolutionaries. After their expulsion, the group responsible for The Industrialist formed the Industrial League (IL). It was started in London, but by August 1909 boasted fourteen branches across the country. The dissidents were agreed both in their opposition to politics and dual unionism. Allen's early policy statement, Revolutionary Unionism (1909) laid down some positive lines of future strategy, including the principal of independence from political parties and the strategy of propaganda within existing unions as a means of building support.³

The IL was concerned at this point to make it clear that it was not officially an Anarchist organisation. However, it urged Anarchists to help in the attempt 'to establish a

the other side were those led by De Leon and the SLP who stressed the need for a political party working in tandem with the union. Eventually a split took place in 1908, one section with its base in Detroit, and the other - the Anarcho-syndicalists - in Chicago. In 1915 the Detroit section, which countenanced political action, changed its name to the Workers' International Industrial Union.

¹ See The Industrial Unionist, V. 1, n. 5, Aug. 1908, p. 1.

² The Industrialist, V. 1, n. 1, June. 1908, pp. 1-2

³ E. J. B. Allen, Revolutionary Unionism, (London, 1909).

revolutionary Industrial Union'.¹ The IL's critics called The Industrialist an 'Anarchist paper' and the IL did not vehemently deny the accusation, unlike its predecessor the BAIU.² Instead, the IL merely pointed out that 'names do not matter', what was of importance was the knowledge that 'the ballot can never emancipate us' and that 'the Industrial Union movement means the wiping out of the political state'.³ The Industrialist was welcomed by Anarchists as a 'first class fighting paper' and the IL was seen as 'essentially Anarchistic in character'.⁴ The role of Anarchists within the IL was to point out 'the fallacies and dangers of centralisation' and help it 'reach its logical aim - Anarchy'.⁵ The Industrialist was initially printed at the Freedom offices and there were interlocking activities that emphasised a close relationship. Jewish tailors in the East End who broke away from the Amalgamated Society of Tailors (AST) over the question of sympathy strikes, and who were heavily influenced by the Arbeter Fraint Anarchists, were helping the IL speakers. The latter, were in turn, advising the Anarchists in the tailoring trades on the formation of 'a federation of autonomous tailoring unions' as a step to Industrial Unionism.⁶ The Anarcho-syndicalist influence within the IL continued to grow and in many places Anarchists dominated the organisation.⁷

The IL's reaction against De Leonism produced an emphasis on liberated consciousness similar to that found within many Anarchist publications. In contrast to the

¹ The Industrialist, V. 1, n. 3, Aug. 1908, p. 5. See also, V. 1, n. 9, Feb. 1909, p. 4.

² The BAIU was always highly sensitive to any accusations that it was anarchistic. See for example The Industrial Unionist, V. 1, n. 5, Aug. 1908, p. 1.

³ The Industrialist, V. 1, n. 5, Oct. 1908, p. 4.

⁴ J. Lane to A. Barker, 1. April, 1912, List 333, Lane Collection, IISH and Freedom, V. 25, n. 269, Sept. 1911, p. 70.

⁵ Freedom, V. 26, n. 273, Jan. 1912, p. 3.

⁶ The Industrialist, V. 1, n. 7, Dec. 1908, p. 5. Allen only had a good relationship with some Anarchists. His links with the Freedom group declined after the publication of his pamphlet Revolutionary Unionism in 1909. In the section called 'The Treachery of Officials' he detailed two cases of bureaucratic demobilisation by the executive of the Shop Assistant's Union - of which Turner of Freedom, was a member. While Turner himself pooh-poohed these cases, Keell, who had already fallen out with Aldred over Turner's position, could not be expected to remain friendly. The Industrialist had been printed by Keell at the Freedom offices and was now forced to find new printers.

⁷ See for example the report on the formation of the Plymouth IL in November 1910 in Freedom, V. 24, n. 259, Nov. 1910, p. 87.

inward looking party virtues of discipline and 'correct' theoretical understanding found in De Leonism, its supporters argued that 'theorising is useless unless it takes for its starting point the actual facts of experience'.¹ Members of the IL also looked beyond the immediate horizon of revolutionary strategy towards the unfettered potential of humanity in post-capitalist society.² This visionary quality, alongside concern for more immediate strategic and tactical considerations, helps explain the appeal of the IL to Anarcho-syndicalists, as does its organisational structure which was based on 'autonomous groups'. It should also be stressed that the Anarchist influence was evident in the IL's fierce anti-statism, which was in excess of other Syndicalist organisations.³ The IL was the largest of the Anarchist influenced Industrial Unionist groupings, winning far more support than Aldred's IUDA since it had rejected dual unionism.

When Tom Mann returned from Australia in 1910 to put his organisational ability behind the simmering revolt, the ground had already been prepared, largely by the Anarcho-syndicalists. Before 1910 a Syndicalist movement was established, but the scale of its support was small. Its influence was boosted however by the revival of industrial unrest after 1910. By October of that year, the signs were obvious, as Freedom put it, of the 'stupendous struggle which is growing on all sides between capital and labour'.⁴ Between 1910 and 1914 the unions underwent a period of militancy and growth. In a period of rising prices and buoyant employment, many workers who had not benefited from the collective bargaining strengths of the established unions sought to make good their claims. In addition the major unions were growing dissatisfied with wage-bargaining procedures which meant that in bad years wages fell. Miners in South Wales rejected the new rates offered by their conciliation board in 1910 and went on strike for eight months during which time troops put down disturbances. In 1911 dockers and seamen struck and

¹ The Industrialist, V. 1, n. 1, June. 1908, p. 2.

² See for example E. J. Allen, Revolutionary Unionism, (London, 1900), p. 3.

³ The Industrialist, V. 2, n. 14, July. 1909, p. 4.

⁴ Freedom, V. 24, n. 258, Oct. 1910, p. 76.

two men were killed in clashes in Liverpool. The average number of working days lost through strikes in a normal year between 1900 and 1909 was 2.5 to 3 million. In 1910, 1911 and 1913 there were about 10 million work days lost. In 1912 the figure was nearly 41 million.¹

Although Syndicalist theory has sometimes been credited with causing this unrest, adequate alternative explanations can be found for the disputes. The theorists, Anarcho-syndicalist or otherwise, were a minority; the majority struck because they believed they could extract better wages and conditions.² Nevertheless, many of the strikes were marked by spontaneity and solidarity at an extraordinary level which culminated in what amounted to a series of local if not national general strikes. Additionally, many of the activists at the centre of the unrest were hostile to and ignored their leaders when their demands were not met in negotiations.³ This provided a fertile field for the propagation of Anarcho-syndicalist principles.

Dual Unionism or Revolutionising from within?

The new sense of class solidarity during the strikes of 1910-11 gave rise to demands from the rank and file for the sweeping away of sectional boundaries between their unions. Here Industrial Unionist propaganda became relevant. Yet the experience of the first years of confrontation had also led to great distrust of the leaderships of unions and the sense of being able to organise separately from these leaderships had become a manifest fact. But in what way was organisation on a larger scale designed to transcend sectional barriers to do this without involving the very leaderships they had grown to distrust? The Industrial Unionist dream of revolutionary unions organised separately from the old unions was, as the experience of the IUDA demonstrated, a non-starter in Britain,

¹ H. Pelling, *History of British Trade Unionism*, (Penguin, London, 1967), p. 261.

² R. Hyman, 'Mass Organisation and Militancy in Britain: Contrasts and Continuities', in Mommsen and Husung (eds), *The Development of Trades Unionism in Great Britain and Germany*, pp. 250-265.

³ This was certainly the case during the 1912 London dock strike. See J. Lovell, *Stevedores and Dockers: A Study of Trade Unionism in the Port of London, 1870-1914*, (Macmillan, London, 1969).

where unions were established well enough and were flexible enough in practice to make this impossible. Another possibility for Anarcho-syndicalists was to change the leaderships of the unions or to bring them more firmly under rank and file control. This was constitutionally, at least, a long term project: the union hierarchies were well protected against their rank and file. A more immediately practical possibility was to organise at the base in such a way as to maximise solidarity and to minimise official interference. In practice attempts were made with varying emphasis and success on all these levels and inevitably there were ambiguities which can be read as either confusion or as the richness of solutions being worked out in practice.

A central figure here was Tom Mann, a convinced Industrial Unionist in the sense that he was hostile to sectionalism and believed in direct action. His main associate was the Anarcho-syndicalist Guy Bowman who sought to make use of Mann's fame in order to promote Anarcho-syndicalism. He therefore proposed that Mann should visit Paris and study the French movement.¹ On their return in June 1910 they issued the Industrial Syndicalist. It propagated a mixture of Industrial Unionism and French Anarcho-syndicalism. Mann saw the task he and Bowman had set themselves clearly: 'It is a big order we are here for: nothing less than an endeavour to revolutionise the trade unions, to make unionism, from a movement of two millions, mostly of skilled workers whose interests are regarded as different from the labourers who join with them in their industry, into a movement that will take in every worker'.² Thus he saw their job as involving an extension and amalgamation of existing unions. Mann knew what the alternatives were:

I hold they are wrong who suppose that we have not genuine class-conscious proletarians in the union movement. I am sure that there are many who understand the class war, and wish to take their rightful share in the fighting; but as yet they can find no satisfactory outlet. Sooner or

¹ The treasurer of the CGT, Charles Marck, Mann's old comrade from his days of international work for the dockers, acted as intermediary, and they went to Paris and 'examined thoroughly the principles and policy of the CGT'. T. Mann, Memoirs, (Macgibbon and Kee Ltd., 1967), p. 203. Bowman also introduced Mann to Anarcho-syndicalists like Christian Cornelissen and Pierre Monatte, the editor of La Vie Ouvrière. On their return to Britain they sent Cornelissen and Monatte reports on events in Britain.

² Industrial Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 4. Nov. 1910, p. 3.

later these turbulent spirits will find a method - and it would be wise on the part of those occupying responsible positions to endeavour to make it easy for such re-organisation as may be necessary, so that those who are determined to fight may not be compelled to find other agencies. Personally, I would...prefer to see the existing machinery made equal to the whole than be driven to the conclusion that new agencies must be brought into existence.¹

Mann went on to ask, 'what will be the essential conditions for the success of such a movement?':

That it will be avowedly Revolutionary in aim, because it will be out for the abolition of the wages system and for securing to the workers the full fruits of their labour, thereby seeking to change the system of society from Capitalist to Socialist. Revolutionary in method, because it will refuse to enter into any long agreements with the masters, whether with legal or state backing, or merely voluntarily; and because it will seize every chance of fighting for the general betterment.²

Mann and Bowman rather fudged the issue of control in the unions in their analysis, but there was no doubt that their call to direct action, their denunciation of cautious and sectional leaders and their policy of working with the existing organisations attracted many recruits.

In November 1910 Bowman and Mann established the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL). Its activists were drawn from all currents of Syndicalist thought with the exception of the De Leonists. Among the strongest supporters were the Anarcho-syndicalists. Turner for example, welcomed its formation:

Industrial Unionism is not Anarchism, but in so far as it is non-political it is quite in accord with Anarchist methods. Its first and most important principle is the solidarity of labour, expressed in an industrial organisation which presents a solid front to the masters on the economic battlefield....It would use the General Strike when necessary and all forms of Direct Action will be the logical outcome of its existence.³

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 1, July, 1910, p. 1. For Bowman, the policy of boring from within was far more likely to succeed than dual unionism: 'Industrial Syndicalism, which aims at the immediate federation of existing unions in any one industry, and the confederation of these industrial federations into one body....is not a milder form of Industrial Unionism. It is however, calculated to be more appealing to the workers'. *The Industrialist*, V. 4, n. 33, Feb. 1911, p. 4.

² *Industrial Syndicalist*, V. 1, n. 1, July, 1910, p. 2.

³ *Freedom*, V. 24, n. 254, June, 1910, p. 44.

Bowman was elected as secretary and many more Anarchists attended the ISEL's inauguration meeting and took an active part in the League's agitational work. In Liverpool, for example, the ISEL was based upon local Anarcho-syndicalist opinion, including individuals like Jim Dick and Pete Larkin.¹

Unlike Mann, Bowman concentrated on the revolutionary potential of trades councils as centres of organisation and education, stressing the need for local unions as the basic industrial pattern. He saw in them 'the only ground on which the problems of labour may be discussed, without the narrowness of view which in the individual unions is apt to permit only the immediate selfish interest of each craft to be discussed'. In this way, trades councils might serve as an Industrial Council, the embryo of an alternative form of social administration. The trades councils would have to 'stand against the municipal council, destroy it, and establish themselves in its place'.² Discussion of a problem in this new setting would, Bowman felt, weld together the aspirations of workers' organisations hitherto fragmented. This in turn would create a spirit of self-reliance whereby the demoralising effects of capitalism on the workers' confidence could be overcome. Bowman's concern for the trades council was not mirrored by his comrades. Although the Industrial Syndicalist produced some material on the role of the trades council within a

¹ Ibid., V. 24, n. 255, July 1910, p. 56, and V. 25, n. 269, Oct. 1911. Pete Larkin was a docker who had worked throughout the world. During the First World War he was in Australia where he joined the IWW, contributing articles to its paper Direct Action. In 1916 he was at Broken Hill spreading propaganda amongst the striking Australian miners. F. Ratz to T. Keell, 19 July. 1916, Freedom Correspondence 1, H-Z, IISH. In June 1924 Larkin formed the Workers' Union of Ireland. See E. O'Connor, Syndicalism in Ireland 1917-23, (Cork University Press, 1988), p. 145.

² See G. Bowman, 'A National Federation of our Trades Councils', The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 2, Feb. 1912, p. 4. In advancing this pattern of organisation Bowman was clearly imitating the French model of Anarcho-syndicalism as expounded by Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget in their 1913 book How Shall We Bring About The Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth. (Pluto Press, London, 1989). It first appeared in Britain in 1913 when it was published by the Anarchist Fred Charles of the Central Labour College. It was issued with a foreword by Tom Mann and a preface by Kropotkin. It also contained an enlarged bibliography by Nettlau. In so far as British workers came under the direct influence of French Anarcho-syndicalists, this book was a main source. See F. Charles to M. Nettlau, 1. Nov. 1913, List 136, NC, IISH.

general Syndicalist strategy, this was described simply as one link in a chain of industrial organisation from union branch to union federation.

The ISEL's inaugural conference was held in Manchester in December 1910 and attracted delegates from 85 union branches and trades councils. Anarcho-syndicalist participants included Bowman, Paton, Leggatt, Tanner, Bowers, Dick and Pete Larkin. Committed Syndicalists such as these were, however, outnumbered by union representatives from the Manchester district.¹ Many delegates preferred not to rule out parliamentary pressure as an additional means of social change alongside industrial militancy. Mann and the other organisers were moreover keen to avoid potentially divisive issues like the value of political action at this stage. For the moment they preferred to consolidate the Syndicalist presence within broad layers of militant opinion, albeit at the expense of theoretical clarity. The limitations of this strategy were nonetheless unwelcome to the Anarcho-syndicalists. They were dismayed at the conference's failure to discuss the case for an anti-parliamentary stance more explicitly. Jim Dick detected a strong residual interest in parliamentary methods. While 'it was obvious that the general feeling of the meeting was to shake off the political element', he nonetheless felt that most delegates 'were like the slaves of all superstitions, who hate their chains yet cling to them madly'.² John Paton agreed, feeling that 'the refusal to take a definitely anti-parliamentary stand can only be described as pure expedience, a trucking to the parliamentary tradition so strong among British workers'.³ Within the limits set by the conference organisers, the meeting was nonetheless successful. In subsequent months the ISEL extended its unifying campaign and expanded its propagandist presence amongst union dissidents.

Yet many Anarcho-syndicalists remained sceptical about the ideology of the new movement. The main issues in contention were the rejection of dual unionism, which

¹ Industrial Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 6, Dec. 1910, pp. 35 and The Syndicalist Railwayman, V. 1, n. 3, Nov. 1911, p. 3.

² Freedom, V. 24, n. 260, Dec. 1910, p. 92.

³ Ibid., V. 24, n. 259, Nov. 1910, p. 85.

alienated Aldred's group, and the refusal to take an unequivocal stand against political action. Suspicion on the second count was however, undermined in the year after the 1910 conference as Mann voiced his increasing alienation from parliament. His earlier statements had not ruled out a subordinate role for parliamentary action, providing it was based upon the predominating strength of an industrial movement. Though he actually ignored this form of political action in practice, his stated attitudes seemed to contradict this. In September 1910 he announced that: 'At the present hour...I favour using all agencies or weapons at our disposal, and I include in these industrial organisations, parliamentary action, and voluntary co-operation'.¹ On his resignation from the SDP in May 1911, however, Mann's growing hostility to parliament was much clearer:

My experiences have driven me....into the non-parliamentary position....I find [that many] in the labour movement have their minds centred upon obtaining some position in public life....I am driven to the belief that this is entirely wrong....So I declare in favour of Direct Industrial Organisation not as a means, but as THE means whereby the workers can overthrow the capitalist system.²

By 1912 the transformation had become complete. In January 1912 the ISEL held its New Year's Eve festivities at Anderton's Hotel, Fleet Street. Mann gave an account of the Liverpool struggle and 'charged himself with foolishness in the past in looking to parliament for labour's emancipation'.³ Malatesta now congratulated the league on its libertarian ideals and Turner and Jack Tanner were elected to the executive committee.⁴ By the Summer of 1912, Mann registered his own evolution away from a political viewpoint by declaring that 'political action is of no use whatsoever'. 'The state is the enemy and the "statists" are opponents of voluntary organisation, voluntary control and voluntary ownership'.⁵ It was this evolution which had paved the way for greater Anarcho-syndicalist participation. Interestingly, the structure of the ISEL was also compatible with

¹ The Industrial Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 3, Sept. 1910, p. 2 and Justice, 10. Sept. 1910.

² Justice, 13. May. 1911.

³ Freedom, V. 25, n. 272, Jan. 1912, p. 34.

⁴ The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 1, Jan. 1912, p. 3.

⁵ Daily Herald, 18. July. 1912, and The Syndicalist, V. 2, nos. 3, 4, March-April, 1913, p. 1.

Anarchism. It refrained from establishing a formal membership and branch structure. All supporters retained complete autonomy to formulate policy and take action as they saw fit within their own organisations.¹

Mann's policy of amalgamation and of radicalising the existing organisations had found him working with 'those occupying responsible positions' in the sectional unions who were so mistrusted by 'the leading turbulent spirits'.² He worked with Havelock Wilson during the seamen's strike and Tillet of the dockers' for the formation of the Transport Workers Federation in 1910 and with the leaders of three competing unions on the railways for the formation of the NUR in 1913. Criticisms from orthodox Industrial Unionism which condemned the 'federation fake', 'sectional unionism' and Mann's failure to form 'real' Industrial unions missed the point.³ The Anarcho-syndicalists were closer to the mark. In November 1910, John Paton wrote on 'Tom Mann and the Industrial Union movement'. He first criticised Mann for his unwillingness to tread on the toes of union leaders over their proclivities towards political careers. More importantly, he went on to say:

In deciding for the retention of the present organisations, Mann has quite evidently failed to get to grips with the root of the problem he is facing. The curse of Trade Unionism in this country is the centralisation of executive power with its resultant multiplication of officials. The corresponding stagnation and death of local life and spirit is the inevitable consequence. This centralisation would be enormously extended and developed by Mann's scheme.....We must decentralise and as far as possible destroy executive power. Let the workers themselves bear the burden and responsibility of decisive action.⁴

During 1911-12 many of the workers themselves were to seize the 'burden and responsibility of decisive action'. Yet for the most part the workers did not look beyond the

¹ The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 8, Sept. 1912, p. 4.

² Industrial Syndicalist, V.1, n. 1, June. 1910.

³ For example, the IWW, said of Mann, that he 'advocates not the formation of the IWW, but simply the closer organisation of trade unions by means of federation and amalgamation'. The Socialist, April. 1910. See also The Industrialist, V. 4, n. 48, June. 1912, pp. 1-2, and The Herald of Revolt, V. 2, n. 5, May. 1912, p. 36, for Industrial Unionist criticisms of Mann and the formation of the National Transport Workers' Federation.

⁴ Freedom, V. 24, n. 259, Nov. 1910, p. 86.

existing organisations and the growth and amalgamation of the unions was accepted as a means of destroying sectionalism. At the same time they were taking steps to decentralise, if not destroy, executive power. The consequence was that leaders and led were bound together often uncomfortably and occasionally in a state of open war. At the base this was represented by the growth of militant bodies at rank and file level, such as the Unofficial Reform Committee (URC) in South Wales. The committee acted as a co-ordinating body for militants in the coalfield and provided a means of communication unmediated by the officials. In 1912 the committee published The Miners' Next Step which proposed a new constitution for the miners on three principles: firstly, that the lodges should have supreme control. Secondly, 'officials or leaders' were to be excluded from the executive which was to be a purely administrative body directly elected by the men. Thirdly, organisers were to be directly under the control of the executive. Although some changes were made in the union these proposals expressed an ideal which was to be frustrated but persistent. The situation was complicated by the election of four militants to the SWMF executive in 1911 - an executive which their programme was basically committed to abolishing.¹ One of these activists was the Anarcho-syndicalist C. J. Smith who published his own Open Letter to the Officials of the SWMF. After attacking the executive for taking excessive salaries and accusing them of urging restraint, Smith outlined his own plans for union democratisation. His ideas were thoroughly in line with the demands of the URC.²

Similar developments were taking place in the North East coalfield in the period leading up to the 1912 miners' strike. Anarcho-syndicalists were endeavouring to revolutionise the Miners' Federation of Great Britain's (MFGB) policy and were agitating for the decentralisation of power and decision making. They were particularly active in Durham.³ Will Lawther and Jim Griffiths were members of this group who were in contact

¹ White, 'Syndicalism in a Mature Industrial Setting: The case of Britain', pp. 110-11.

² C. J. Smith, Open Letter to the SWMF, (Swansea, 1912).

³ D. Douglas, Pit Life in County Durham, (Oxford, 1972), p. 68.

with the Welsh militants. Lawther recalled selling 'dozens of copies' of The Miners' Next Step in the coalfield.¹ During the 1912 strike unrest was particularly acute in Durham, where the miners voted against the union leaders decision to return to work. Here Anarcho-syndicalist activists were responsible for organising resistance, touring the coalfields in lorries in opposition to the official decision to return.² At this time Lawther made no secret of his advanced views, as he demonstrated at a public meeting called to explain Anarcho-syndicalism. He declared that as an Anarchist he regarded the recent unrest 'as an upheaval for the purpose of throwing over the leaders'.³

The consolidation of organised Syndicalism, begun with the foundation of the ISEL in 1910, continued throughout the next two years as support for Syndicalism expanded. By the start of 1913 a measure of unification had taken place. Advance was reflected in the increase of The Syndicalist's monthly circulation to 20,000 during the course of 1912,⁴ and in the attendance at two ISEL conferences held in November 1912. These meetings, in London and Manchester, attracted delegates representing over 100,000 workers. Participants were drawn from unions, trades councils and amalgamation committees.⁵ The conferences reaffirmed the ultimate aim of workers' control of the social system and the principal methods - Industrial Unionism and the general strike. Alongside this declaration, however, there also developed a process of closer organisational cohesion.

¹ Holton, British Syndicalism, p. 113.

² The Times, 2. April. 1912.

³ See The Herald of Revolt, V. 3, n. 1, Feb. 1913, pp. 6-7 for Lawther's account of the anti-leader campaign amongst the Durham miners.

⁴ The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 5, June. 1912, p. 1. Bowman published The Syndicalist from his house in Walthamstow. The new journal was more directly Anarcho-syndicalist in inspiration than the Industrial Syndicalist, which it replaced as the organ of the ISEL. It also stressed the need for greater decentralisation. Bowman was also responsible for the publication of the Syndicalist Railwayman between September and December 1911. The paper was the organ of Syndicalist militants seeking to counter 'the piffle of The Railway Review', the official organ of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS). The journal reflected Bowman's admiration for French Anarcho-syndicalism and gave extensive coverage to events in France as well as Britain. Its first editorial stressed that it would be 'a relentless critic of that official policy which seeks to suppress, or hold in check, the new revolutionary spirit'. The Syndicalist Railwayman, V. 1, n. 1, Sept. 1911, p. 1. The journal also published articles by Anarchists like George Barrett. It ceased publication in December 1911.

⁵ The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 10, Nov. 1912, p. 5.

Local branches were set up throughout the winter of 1912-13, while moves were set afoot to produce a formal constitution. 'Up to now', wrote Bowman:

the League has been an amorphous organisation...There were but a few comrades who started it, and the need for a definite constitution....was not felt. We were all friends, and we just selected a committee and appointed a general secretary and president....and let them get on with the work of spreading propaganda....Now, owing to the establishment of provincial groups and the increase of membership, it is desirable that the whole body of members should have a voice in saying what shall be done.¹

The first annual general meeting of the ISEL was held in February 1913 when officers and an executive committee were elected. Mann remained president and Bowman secretary. A formal set of rules was also adopted based upon the following objectives:

To carry on among trade unionists....a campaign of education in the principles of syndicalism...since its immediate purpose is to conduct a scientific class war against capitalism, such war having for its objective the capture of the industrial system and its management by the workers themselves.²

The ISEL was still seen as primarily a propaganda organisation. Activity was not directed towards the creation of new unions, nor towards independent workplace organisation on the later shop steward model, but orientated instead towards the existing union movement which it was hoped to radicalise from within.

The 1913 reorganisation of the ISEL represented the high point of organisational cohesion within the Syndicalist movement. Yet by the autumn, the ISEL had been torn into rival factions. Why was this so? The main points at issue centred on union strategy and the proper organisational form of the industrial movement. Conflict arose between those who argued that Syndicalists should reconstruct existing unions on revolutionary lines and the dual unionists. The former group felt that Syndicalists should confine their efforts to revolutionary propaganda, leaving revolutionary action to emerge from the existing unions once they had been radicalised. On the other hand the dual unionists, now led by Bowman, abandoned the ISEL's policy of union reconstruction, and united with others who felt the

¹ *Ibid.*, V. 2, n. 2, Feb. 1913, p. 4

² *Ibid.*, V. 2, ns. 3, 4, March/April. 1913, pp. 3-5.

priority to be the creation of a separate revolutionary union centre. This change of emphasis stemmed from the feeling that the ISEL as it stood lacked a clear-cut revolutionary identity. The policy of union reconstruction simply submerged a revolutionary message in radical wage militancy. The supporters of union reconstruction, however, were unrepentant in their belief that dual unionism would have disastrous consequences, serving merely to isolate revolutionary activists from the broader climate of industrial militancy. Time was to show that Syndicalist propaganda within the existing unions was far more effective than dual unionism in promoting the dialogue between industrial militancy and revolutionary ideas. At the same time the supporters of union reconstruction were never able to overcome the resistance of union leaders, or convince the majority of the rank and file to support the wider aim of converting unions into revolutionary bodies.¹

The collapse of the ISEL was a deep blow to Syndicalist unity.² It was only in late 1913 that a process of regrouping took place. One current which played little part in this

¹ Turner, a supporter of revolutionising the existing unions, told the 1913 International Syndicalist congress that it was often the case that 'the rank and file....[are] not with the Syndicalists'. He 'was an official [and] knew that the members were not so advanced as many of the leaders. If they were, the officials would change colour pretty quickly. Syndicalists had a difficult work of propaganda before them'. *The Syndicalist*, V. 2, n. 5, Dec. 1913, p. 2.

² The collapse of the ISEL did not take place until its Anarcho-syndicalist members had helped organise an international congress in London on 27th September. Jack Tanner gave the report on British Syndicalism. The British, he commented, had been deluded too long by their 'antediluvian trade union leaders'. He was optimistic about the future, and regarded the formation of the NUR as a movement in the direction of Syndicalism, although he argued that the rank and file should ensure that they kept control of the organisation in their own hands. Turner and Tanner represented the Shop Assistants and the engineers respectively. The ISEL also mandated delegates, though Bowman himself elected to fill the open mandate sent by the Brazilian Worker's Federation. Acting as translators were Cornelissen and Schapiro. Although an international was not founded, the assembly established an International Syndicalist Information Bureau as a step towards the establishment of a fully-fledged international to unite revolutionary unions opposed to the reformist Berlin International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres. The delegates also formulated the first international declaration of Syndicalist principles which repudiated political in favour of direct economic action. It declared the unions to be the means both to achieve the socialisation of production and to administer the economy thereafter, and maintained that only autonomously organised Industrial Unions could win the workers' dual emancipation 'from capitalism and the state'. The agenda for the congress is located in the Jack Tanner Papers, 'Syndicalism 1912-20', Box 5/2, Nuffield College Library, Oxford. See also *The Times*, Oct. 2 and 3, 1913, *The Syndicalist*, V. 2, n. 5, Dec. 1913, p. 2, and *Freedom*, V. 27, n. 294, Oct. 1913, p. 80, where the declaration is produced in full.

was the dual unionist rump of the ISEL, which was far from influential. Its main impact was through Bowman who remained a popular Anarcho-syndicalist speaker at union branches. The ISEL's journal The Syndicalist was still evident in revolutionary circles though its circulation had fallen and it had difficulty in maintaining a monthly publication deadline. This decline reflected its sectarian tone, which condemned all other varieties of Syndicalism as false. This inevitably alienated a great deal of support. Even its Anarcho-syndicalist dual unionist supporters drifted away over time. It could however, claim one success.

Wilf McCartney and several other dual unionist Anarcho-syndicalist supporters of Bowman were instrumental in forming a Syndicalist union among the waiters and cooks in London's West End during 1912. This was the French Cooks Syndicate, which despite its name was open to all catering workers. The Syndicate was set up in opposition to the dominant Waiter's Union and Baker's Union which were established 'on the old respectable trade union lines'.¹ It was ran by a committee of workers' delegates elected from branches of the catering trade. The committee was not an executive however, and took their orders from the members' meetings. McCartney recalled: 'there was no boss to betray the syndicate....and no room for the union careerist....The workers in any hotel could, if unanimous, tell the committee to arrange a strike. The committee had to do what it was told.' The Syndicate was involved in over thirty strikes between 1912 and 1914, many of which were victorious.²

The dual unionist Anarcho-syndicalists also remained strong enough to finance their own paper in tandem with Guy Aldred, The Herald of Revolt, which continued to propagate his own pro-IWW sympathies.³ Aldred continued to attack the Freedom group

¹ Wilf McCartney, Dare to Be Daniel! A History of one of Britain's Earliest Syndicalist Unions. (KSL, 1992), p. 9.

² Ibid., p. 10.

³ The Herald of Revolt, V. 2, n. 5, May. 1912, pp. 36-7.

Anarcho-syndicalists for overlooking the vagaries of union leaders.¹ His paper also condemned the campaigns for amalgamation and federation as led by officials, intent on 'the centralisation of power', and aimed at preventing the formation of 'real industrial unions'.² Aldred's main contacts were with the dual unionist rump of the IL, which still contained many Anarcho-syndicalists.³ The IL had been granted a charter as the English section of the Chicago IWW in 1910 and Aldred started to hold joint meetings with its speakers.⁴ This arrangement does not seem to have matured however, and in 1913 the IWW sent an organiser named George Swasey to England and by the end of that year there were six branches of the IWW in the country and a new paper, the Industrial Worker.⁵ Friendly relations were however preserved with the Herald of Revolt Anarchists, and IWW speaking platforms were regularly used by them.⁶

The amalgamation movement.

For those Anarcho-syndicalists who were opposed to dual unionism, another option was to revolutionise the existing unions by supporting the Amalgamation Committee movement. This was so named because of the large number of unions involved in the engineering industry, around which it was based, and the desire of militants to draw these

¹ Ibid., V. 2, n. 6, June. 1912, p. 50.

² Ibid., V. 3, n. 7, Aug. 1913, p. 87.

³ In March 1913 an Anarchist member of the IL was writing: 'I find that many Industrial Unionists are Anarchists and many others are virtually Anarchist without knowing it: the balance is rapidly becoming a negligible quantity....I hold therefore that all working class Anarchists should join the IWW....I have been a member of the Industrial League for a considerable time. The other members with whom I happen to be acquainted are also Anarchists and include some of the most influential members'. Freedom, V. 27, n. 289, March. 1913, p. 23.

⁴ When the Industrialist suspended publication in June 1912 because of financial difficulties Aldred offered to come to an arrangement whereby the IL could use half of the Herald of Revolt.

⁵ See the account of the founding meeting of the British section of the IWW in the Daily Herald, 20. Feb. 1913. In 1914 W. G. E. Smith, a regular contributor to The Herald of Revolt, became its General Secretary. There was a strong Anarcho-syndicalist element within the British IWW sections and their headquarters were located in Whitechapel where several Jewish Anarcho-syndicalists were active. In 1912 for example, Esther Archer was attempting to organise the Rothmans cigarette factory for the IWW. See S. Kadish, Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution, (Frank Cass and Co, London, 1992), p. 235.

⁶ When Bill Haywood, the leading organiser of the IWW, visited Britain in 1913, Aldred spoke at several of the same meetings. The Herald of Revolt, V. 4, n. 1, Jan. 1914, pp. 4-5.

bodies together.¹ A committee of engineers in Manchester had been set up in 1910 to push the principles of direct action, solidarity and amalgamation.² Such propaganda activity merged with the already existing shop stewards organisation.³ The shop stewards had appeared because of the necessity of workshop negotiations - particularly over piecework prices. As such they were the workshop representative of their union. It was inevitable that the need for mutual support would draw the representatives of the different unions together - although craft jealousies would often drive them apart.

From this point it was a logical step to make the stewards a basis of amalgamation. In Sheffield, for example, a shop steward suggested in 1914 'that all the trade unionists in any shop should have shop stewards who should form themselves into a committee to represent the workers in that shop regardless of the unions they belonged to and thus make the first step towards uniting the unions'.⁴ Thus the amalgamation committee in the workshop both formed what we could call a joint shop stewards' committee and provided an inter-union basis of co-ordination and communication separate from the officials. The opposition to the officials was clearly expressed. A pamphlet issued by C.H. Stavenhagen, an Anarcho-syndicalist member of the Metal Engineering and Shipbuilding Amalgamation Committee, described its functions as twofold. Firstly, it was to encourage amalgamation and to eventually seize control of the industry. Secondly, in the meantime it was 'to act as a Vigilance Committee, watching and actively criticising the officials of the various sectional unions and in every way possible stimulating and giving expression to militant thought throughout the movement'.⁵ Stavenhagen was not the only

¹ See B. Pribicevic, The Shop Stewards Movement and Workers' Control, 1910-1922, (Oxford University Press, 1959), Chap. 4.

² Industrial Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 3, Aug. 1910.

³ H.A Clegg, A. Fox, A.F Thompson, A History of British Trades Unions, V. 1, (Oxford, 1964), p. 132.

⁴ J. T. Murphy, New Horizons, (London, 1941), pp. 44-5. See also The Syndicalist, V. 2, n. 1, Jan. 1913, p. 4.

⁵ C.H. Stavenhagen, Industrial Unionism - Labour's Final Weapon, (London, 1912). Stavenhagen had been associated with the Herald of Revolt which favoured a dual unionist approach. Evidently he found this an impossibilist position and opted instead to revolutionise the existing unions from within. This policy, however, had its own problems. In November 1915 he was expelled from the

Anarcho-syndicalist involved in the Engineering and Shipbuilding amalgamation committee, Jack Tanner was also a leading figure.

By no means were all the amalgamationists committed Anarcho-syndicalists, but the emphasis of amalgamation committee work was broadly Syndicalist in character. Union amalgamation was increasingly seen not simply as organisational reform to achieve greater efficiency in collective bargaining, but more ambitiously as part of the struggle for Industrial Unionism. As we have seen, it was common for revolutionaries to criticise the divisiveness of a union movement fragmented among a multiplicity of sectional organisations and often dominated by a spirit of craft unionism. This sectionalism was seen as a source of weakness, which condemned unionism to a defensive posture and prevented any challenge to capitalist priorities in the organisation of work. Industrial unions were seen at one and the same time as a means of uniting workers in different occupations, skilled and unskilled, and also as potential vehicles of workers' control. Covering the whole of an industry, each union would be in a position to devise an integrated set of policies reflecting workers' interests and ultimately to take over the direction from capitalist management. Industrial Unionism then, as envisaged by revolutionaries like Tanner, was not conceived as simple organisational reform directed towards more efficient bargaining. It was seen instead as an embodiment of class rather than craft consciousness implying 'militancy and aggression'.¹

Electrical Trades Union for slandering the General President. He had accused the executive council of 'trickery' and of breaking the unions' rules during the re-election of the president. After being expelled he printed a pamphlet, paid for by many members, explaining why this had occurred and appealing to the rank and file to demand his reinstatement. Stavenhagen believed he had been victimised since he advocated 'bitter and relentless hostility to the officials'. He called on the membership to vote out the Executive and join those like himself who were not out 'to get well paid jobs where they can sit tight for life' and instead to support 'the demolition of the craft union system of organisation' and 'bring about the fusion of all unions into one vast industrial organisation'. Stavenhagen believed he and others were being singled out since they advocated Industrial Unionism. They were accused of trying to break up the union. According to Stavenhagen the real reason he was ousted was because he had opposed the EC's decision not to hold a ballot on the Munitions Act. See C. H. Stavenhagen, To Members of the Electrical Union. (London, 1915), pp. 1-5.

¹ Solidarity, V. 1, n. 11, July, 1914, p. 3.

Syndicalist influence within the amalgamation movement was further reinforced by the formation of an Amalgamation Committees Federation (ACF) in 1912.¹ This acted as a rallying point for those Syndicalists hostile to dual unionism, but fragmented after the ISEL split. In the autumn of 1913 the ACF was reconstituted as the Industrial Democracy League (IDL) whose goal was 'the conversion of the existing organisations, and the endowing of them with a militant spirit'.² The regrouping around the IDL involved militants like Tom Mann, and Anarcho-syndicalists like Tanner, Stavenhagen, Beacham and Fred Bowers. Tanner was assistant general secretary of the organisation. He was also responsible for the publication of Solidarity, which in September 1913 became the organ of the IDL.³

The IDL's platform was set out by Tanner in the first issue. This reaffirmed the objective as preparing 'the workers for their economic emancipation by taking possession of the means of production and distribution through an economic organisation outside the control of any parliamentary party'. The need for revolutionary change was, however, set out in terms of workers' 'recent experience during the labour unrest'. Successful wage militancy, for example, though necessary as a means of defence, was seen as inadequate, having been largely offset by price increases and by the introduction of labour displacing machinery. The recent years had not only seen increasing centralisation of capitalist industrial power through industrial concentration and employer federation, but also an

¹ The Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 11 Dec. 1912, p. 4. A conference of Amalgamation committees had taken place in London during November in order to establish such a federation. Bowman presided over the meeting.

² Solidarity, V. 1, n. 1, Sept. 1913, p. 4.

³ In June 1913 Tanner set out on a trip around Europe, accompanied by the Swedish Syndicalist, Albert Jensen. In France he met Pierre Monatte and Alfred Rosmer and in Spain members of the CNT. Tanner no doubt learnt more about Anarcho-syndicalism during his visits. For an account of his tour see Tanner's diary entries in 1913 diary, Jack Tanner Papers, Box 7, Nuffield College Library, Oxford. When he returned to Britain in September 1913 Tanner sent Alfred Rosmer and the French Anarcho-syndicalists 'Letters from London' for the journal La Vie Ouvrière. They were for the most part reports on subjects like the Dublin strike and the Builders' lockout. See La Vie Ouvrière, 5. Dec. 1913, 5. Jan. 1914, 20. March. 1914, 20. April 1914, 5. May. 1914. Likewise, Jensen, sent articles to Tanner's paper. See for example his 'Nationalisation or Expropriation?', Solidarity, V. 1, n. 4, Dec. 1913, p. 6.

increase in capitalist state power as demonstrated by Labour exchange and National Insurance legislation. Such developments were an 'extension of the tentacles of the state into the vitals of organised labour'.¹ This pronounced anti-state theme formed a re-current element in the pages of Solidarity and reflected the strong Anarcho-syndicalist influence.²

Having outlined recent trends in capitalist power, Tanner went on to contrast capitalist resilience with the meagre gains of the strike wave. The reasons for this lack of progress were identified as 'sectionalism', 'methods of fighting', 'bureaucratic control of unions' and 'objectives'. Standard Syndicalist arguments were deployed to show the inability of sectional unionism to fight capitalist concentration, and the consequent need for Industrial Unionism. Policies of conciliation and arbitration developed in many industries had also failed, and could never work given the fundamental 'strife in society over the division of wealth'. Union bureaucratisation had played a similarly negative role in so far as most officials failed to lead strike action. The problem of official resistance to fighting policies was not however, explained in terms of bad faith, but rather as a product of structural constraints. Tanner declared that 'Bureaucracy is inimical to initiative; the workers must be allowed to develop [their own] collective initiative'. Finally, given the fundamental nature of the class war, a clear change was required in objectives, abandoning 'A fair day's work for a fair day's pay' for 'The abolition of the wages system'.³

The immediate aims of the amalgamation movement were rapidly achieved. Between the autumn of 1913 and summer 1914 a number of local committees were

¹ Solidarity, V. 1, n. 1, Sept. 1913, p. 1.

² Ibid., V. 1, n. 3., Nov. 1913, p. 4. Under Tanner's editorship the paper was sufficiently libertarian in outlook to publish extracts from Kropotkin's Conquest of Bread and for James Tochatti to write a series of satirical 'phrenological' studies of prominent labour leaders where particular attention was drawn to 'bumps of ambition' or 'bumps of avarice'. See Solidarity, V. 1, n. 3, Nov. 1913, p. 8 and V. 1, n. 4, Dec. 1913, p. 13. The paper collapsed shortly after the outbreak of war, but in December 1916 was revived by a group of dual unionists allied with the Chicago IWW. Despite intimate relations with the Shop Stewards movement, on whom the paper rapidly became dependent for its workshop sales, E.C Pratt and S.A Wakeling, the editor and manager, remained unrepentant dual unionists. Ultimately they were forced to resign, and in the summer of 1918 were replaced by Tanner, who (in his second stint as editor) was much closer in outlook to the dominant sections of the shop stewards movement.

³ Solidarity, V. 1, n. 1, Sept. 1913, p. 1, V. 1, n. 7, April. 1914, p. 7.

established in most of the main engineering centres.¹ Within these groups skilled members of the ASE, Ironfounders and Amalgamated Toolmakers were able to co-operate with semi-skilled or unskilled members of the Workers' Union. Wider Syndicalist emphases were also successfully elaborated through energetic speaker campaigns, within the columns of Solidarity, and in pamphlet literature. The Anarcho-syndicalists played a full part in these activities.

Anarcho-syndicalist influenced amalgamation movements were also important in the building industry, another sector where unrest was common after 1912. It was most prominent in those trades affected by skills-displacement, like bricklaying and masonry. Significant Anarcho-syndicalist minorities developed within the Operative Stonemasons Society (OSS) and the Operative Bricklayers Society (OBS) over the course of the unrest. The organisational origins of Syndicalism within the building trades were centred on the Provisional Committee for the Amalgamation of Existing Trade Unions formed in 1910 and the building trades consolidation committee established under its aegis in 1911.² Both organisations included a number of radical stonemasons led by the Anarcho-syndicalists Fred Bowers and John Hamilton of the OSS.³ The latter were the authors of a particularly cogent article on the need for Syndicalism in the building trades published in 1911.⁴ This stressed the need for Industrial Unionism as the only way of combating skill-displacing technological change, and argued for direct action rather than conciliation boards as the

¹ See Ibid., V. 1, nos. 5-11, Jan-July, 1914.

² Industrial Syndicalist, V. 1, n. 7, Dec. 1910. It is significant that the original move to establish the committee came from the Walthamstow branch of the OBS, since Walthamstow was an important centre of Anarcho-syndicalist influence. It was here that the publication teams responsible for both Solidarity and The Syndicalist, were located.

³ Operative Stonemasons Fortnightly Journal, 27 Nov. 1912, cited in Holton, 'Syndicalism and Labour on Merseyside, 1906-14', p. 144. Bowers had spent time working in the USA as a stonemason. This introduced him to the ideas of De Leon and Eugene Debs, both of whom played key roles in the foundation of the IWW. When he returned to Liverpool in 1908, he began spreading Industrial Unionist propaganda. See F. Bowers, The Rolling Stonemason, (1936), pp. 138-146.

⁴ See J. Hamilton and F. Bowers, 'Amalgamation of the Building Trades Union', Transport Worker, Dec. 1911, pp. 100-1.

main weapon of industrial warfare. In a further article, Bowers outlined their long-term plans:

We are out...for amalgamation of all unions in the building industry into one union [and] to own our industries....The future strikes will be short and sharp. With our....industrial unions, acting through a federation of unions, demanding a minimum wage of twenty, thirty, forty or fifty shillings a week and a lessening of hours worked, until all employable men are working, we shall build up our strength until the day when we are ready to abolish the wage system and the state.¹

Between 1912 and 1913 Anarcho-syndicalists within the building trade were increasingly making the running on the amalgamation issue, becoming identified with the Industrial Union cause itself. The identification of Anarcho-syndicalists with union reorganisation was demonstrated in the internal politics of the OSS. Here a growing polarisation between moderate officials backed up by loyal branches on the one hand, and militant Anarcho-syndicalists backed up by dissident branches on the other was evident. The latter group was led by the Liverpool and Leeds branches including Bowers, Hamilton, recently elected as a regional organiser, and W.T. Evans, 'Syndicalist, Revolutionist and Anarchist'.²

Although of some significance, the growth of Anarcho-syndicalist influence was not sufficient to offset the resistance of most officials to amalgamation. Their resistance was dictated by motives of self-preservation since amalgamation would undoubtedly undermine their standing. Some would have to be content with subordinate positions in any new union, while others might lose their positions altogether. In addition, most officials believed that sectional organisation, backed up if necessary by federation of kindred trades, would still be able to provide effective union activity. Federation also satisfied the rank and file who were not prepared to go as far as the Anarcho-syndicalists. The official campaign

¹ *Solidarity*, V. 1, n. 5, Jan-Feb., 1914, p. 7. See also Bowers's report on the progress of the Building Trades' Amalgamation Committee, 'There are Seventy Two Unions in the Building Industry - We Want One', *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 3, Nov. 1913, p. 7.

² See *Operative Stonemasons Fortnightly Journal*, 1912-14, cited in Holton, *British Syndicalism*, pp. 156-7.

for National Federation was opposed by Bowers on the grounds that it complicated the existing union machinery. It would:

set up another official body and does not lessen the number of unions. It unites officials, but not the rank and file. It has no security of support, because any union or number of unions can withdraw at any time. It fails to initiate a trade movement, because it leaves the control of all trade matters still in the hands of the respective unions, thereby making joint action purely speculative.¹

For the officials and the majority of the members however, the federation scheme was as far as they felt able to go.

It was often hard to disentangle the influence of Anarcho-syndicalism from the other Syndicalist currents circulating at this time, as in the pre-war years the labour movement was shot through with ideas common to all these currents in tone and aspiration. Nevertheless, the above discussion has demonstrated that the Anarcho-syndicalists made a distinct contribution to the development of Syndicalism, a contribution that has been largely ignored in previous accounts of the British movement. Indeed, some have gone as far as claiming that any Anarchist current that 'stood even a remote chance of evolving along Syndicalist lines was non-existent'.² The Anarcho-syndicalists were among Syndicalism's first pioneers and they took an active part in all the debates on policy that afflicted the wider movement in the following years. They also took a leading role in the amalgamation movement.

Yet it should also be stated that Syndicalism represented something of a double edged sword for the Anarchists. On the one hand it made Anarchism far more relevant to the workers and allowed the Anarchists to break out of a sectarian ghetto, but on the other it seemed possible that it might undermine the totality of the Anarchist project and lead Anarchists down a reformist path. It was certainly true that Anarcho-syndicalism involved many compromises. As we have seen the formation of Syndicalist organisations, even those

¹ *Solidarity*, V. 1, n. 3, Nov. 1913, p. 7.

² J. White, 'Syndicalism in a Mature Industrial Setting: The case of Britain', pp. 101-2

with an Anarchist tinge, was not a true triumph of Anarchism; it was rather a reflection of a period in which Anarchists learnt to compromise. It was this compromise that worried many other Anarchists and it was not surprising that they responded by providing some of the most cogent criticisms of Syndicalism.

It should also be stressed that Syndicalisms' advance was not seriously hampered by the Anarchist stigma attached to it by its Social Democratic enemies. Among those who accepted the basic tenets of Syndicalism, the fear of identification with Anarchism does not appear to have stunted its growth. This would suggest that the wider perception of Anarchism within the labour movement had also changed. Whereas previously it had been seen as the preserve of terrorists and individualists, in the years of the Syndicalist revolt, Anarchism was viewed as an integral part of the revolutionary milieu. This change of perception was due to the activities of the Anarcho-syndicalists.

Chapter Seven. Anarchism and the politics of gender 1880-1914.

The central beliefs of Anarchist ideology - individual liberty, the responsibility to refrain from limiting the freedom of others, and the rejection of all hierarchy - provided a unique opportunity to women who felt restricted by conventional gender roles. Women were drawn to Anarchism due to its analysis of power and hierarchy. After all, an ideology that claimed as its principal tenet the primacy of personal autonomy ought to have had special appeal to a subordinate group. This appeal existed despite the fact that some of the men who developed Anarchist theory did not apply the doctrine of individual liberty to women in the same way as to men.¹ The Anarchist men who viewed women in conventional ways argued that certain behaviour patterns were natural for each sex. Since nature provided woman with a nurturing instinct and a desire for motherhood, to have her act in accord with those feelings would not violate her freedom because they would be an expression of her natural self. Much Socialist writing on the evolution of the family in our period drew on studies by anthropologists whose analyses of the changing status of women were not part of liberatory schemes, but were instead efforts to understand what family structure the next stage of history required in order to insure social stability and an improved race. Many Socialists shared these eugenic concerns, along with a particular interest in determining the proper role for women in a working-class, rather than a feminist, revolution.

Anarchist women, especially those who were influenced by the individualist current within Anarchist thought, disagreed with this notion of woman's nature. Dismissing the interpretation of the male theorists, they appropriated for themselves the dogma of absolute individual liberty, reminded their male comrades of their responsibility not to

¹ Proudhon had considered the patriarchal family as the fundamental social unit in his society without laws. Kropotkin, while arguing for the liberation of women from the burden of housework, expressed impatience with those women who put feminism ahead of their devotion to the male working-class. See G. Woodcock, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1956), p. 243 and P. Kropotkin, The Conquest of Bread, (Elephant Editions, London, 1985), p. 128.

infringe on the liberty of women, and rejected patriarchal as well as governmental authority. In their lives and work they gave evidence of their determination to apply Anarchist beliefs equally to both sexes. Anarcho-feminists insisted that female subordination was rooted in an obsolete system of sexual and familial relationships. Attacking marriage and insisting on economic independence, they argued that personal autonomy was an essential component of sexual equality.

Anarcho-feminism constituted a vigorous challenge to traditional notions of woman's place, including in its analysis a demand for economic independence, the revolutionising of marital relations and an end to male sexual harassment. For Anarchist women the Socialists' focus on order and discipline offered less than the Anarchist promise of radically independent and equal individuals, interacting in small, naturally harmonious groups, freed from the disabilities of manmade laws and the roles and authority of the family. Although many women possessed the municipal franchise, the fact that national political institutions were closed to them, may have made Anarchism more attractive. The Anarchist programme, unlike that of the Socialists, did not depend on feminists gaining access to national politics. Our analysis of this programme will challenge the view that the Anarchists were 'blind to the existence of gender based tyrannies'.¹ The study of the British Anarcho-feminists suggests that this was not the case.

Feminists and Socialists.

By the 1880's, there was a generally acknowledged social phenomenon underway in Britain whose complexity was captured in the open-ended phrase used to describe it: 'The Woman Question'. All over Britain women were demanding change. No single word or coherent ideology was available that unified and explained this discontent and the term

¹ S. Gemie, 'Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey', *Women's History Review*, V. 5, n. 3, 1996, p. 418. Gemie's view is not an exception. John Hutton argues that within late 19th century Anarchist political culture, there was a 'theoretical void' concerning the politics of gender. J. Hutton, 'Camille Pissarro's Turpitudes Sociales and late Nineteenth Century French Anarchist anti-feminism, in *History Workshop Journal*, n. 32, 1987, p. 41.

feminism did not emerge until the Edwardian period. There was, however, one term gaining currency that claimed to address as well as make sense of the whole range of women's grievances. While the word 'Socialism' seemed to count as many definitions as there were Socialists all these definitions and advocates agreed that Socialism meant, among other things, freedom for women. Most forms of Socialism elevated women to a privileged place beside working men in a movement that idolised the powerless.¹ Furthermore, Socialism offered a theory, depending on the particular theorist, that placed women's oppression in a historical context, showing how it had arisen, and how it could be overcome. Every organisation that called itself Socialist included in its aims a demand for equal rights between men and women.² If a woman took the 'Woman Question' seriously, and she was looking for a word to express these convictions, she might call herself a 'Socialist'.

However, the practical meaning of 'women's freedom' was subject to the same varying interpretations as the political implications of Socialism. For many Socialists, women's freedom meant freedom to return to their 'natural' role as mothers and homemakers. 'Women's equality' was interpreted to mean equal respect within their own separate sphere. An emphasis on women's common interests as a sex, and a recognition that working women could be oppressed by male members of their own class at the workplace and in the home, sat uneasily beside a Socialist focus on class exploitation and the need for class solidarity to achieve change.³ Many Socialist men argued that feminist concerns should be subordinated to the wider question of male working-class liberation.⁴

¹ Freedom was careful to place women within the exploited class: 'It is no new observation that the position of woman and wage-worker are very similar under these conditions of universal exploitation'. Freedom, V. 1, n. 7, April. 1887, p. 27.

² The Commonweal, July. 1885.

³ The SDF viewed 'the woman question' as a diversion from the class struggle which could be resolved after a revolution had been achieved. It was assumed that feminist issues should be a matter of personal conviction rather than party policy. Justice, Nov. 1895. The ILP placed less emphasis on the class struggle and showed a greater sympathy towards 'sex equality'. Nevertheless, in practice the ILP did not give a high profile in the 1890's to issues relating to sex disabilities. See E. Gordon, Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland, 1850-1914, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991).

⁴ See for example Freedom, V. 22, n. 232, Aug. 1908, pp. 57-8.

Socialist organisers also learned quickly that women could be useful in the time consuming project of building a popular movement. Often the tedious tasks of organisation and day to day work were performed by women.¹ Women were needed, but in the right proportion so as not to risk Socialism's reputation as an intellectually and politically serious movement.

While the assumptions about women's intellectual limitations and their role within the movement were often products of debilitating but well-intentioned courtesy and custom, some male activists were so vocal about women's inferiority that their views can only be described as misogynistic.² The Rossetti's recollections of their period of Anarchist activity include many evocations of deep-rooted sexism amongst male Anarchists. One male comrade explained: 'Women are rarely of much use in a movement like ours. They so rarely seem able to forget themselves, to detach themselves from the narrow interests of their own lives. They are still slaves of their past, of their passions, and of all manner of prejudices'.³

Women therefore went about their Socialist work in a movement where the inherent intellectual inferiority of women was seriously argued. The most notorious spokesman for this view was Belfort Bax. He believed that woman's most 'prominent characteristic' was her 'inability to follow out a logical argument'.⁴ In expressing these opinions he posed a challenge to the equality and fellowship that defined the very essence

¹ Lilian Wolfe for example, did the 'hack work' on The Voice of Labour and a lot of women who went into Socialist feminist liberation found themselves in that position. As the only woman on the SL council, Eleanor Marx 'ensured that the League's journals and pamphlets were on display at meetings; found a window cleaner for the premises; compared estimates for the most economical hire of crockery, cutlery and plate for socialist repasts'. T. Keell to M. Nettleau, 19. March. 1926, List 188, NC, IISH and Y. Kapp, Eleanor Marx: the Crowded Years 1884-1898, (Virago, London, 1979), p. 72. The division of labour within the left, between 'women's work' and high profile, leadership positions dominated by men, more than once was the cause of disaffection and separation with women activists breaking off to form their own groups. J. Hannam, 'Women and Politics', in J. Purvis, (ed), Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945, (UCL Press, London, 1995), p. 218.

² Henry Seymour for example, used 'womanish' as his favourite term of abuse and tended to rest his arguments on the intrinsic inferiority of his opponents whenever debating with a woman. See Justice, 16. July. 1887.

³ I. Meredith, A Girl Among the Anarchists, (Lincoln, Nebraska University Press, 1992, first published in 1902.), p. 233.

⁴ The Commonweal, April. 1886.

of Socialism for many Anarchist feminists. The rejection by women of traditional domestic roles, Bax argued, had led:

to the illusion among men that they must look on their womankind not merely for sexual fidelity, and kindness in word and conduct, but for intellectual companionship, and to the reading into their relations with their wives and other female associates an intellectual companionship which is not there.¹

The British had 'deified women', claimed Bax, and placed them in an undeserved position of privilege and ease. "'Privileges" have been granted to us', Agnes Henry responded:

with thinly veiled contempt, and polished courtesy has been the veneer of male self-conceit....I can assure Mr. Bax from personal knowledge that most of those who would abolish artificial sex privileges are quite ready to resign the privilege of walking out of a room in front of a man.²

Bax persisted with his anti-feminist claims, perhaps because he had the support of many other men. To Hyndman, 'the amusing part of the matter' was that it was 'the truth of some of his statements in regard to their sex which has made the women socialists so furiously angry'.³

Hyndman himself believed that women were the most reactionary group in society, a view shared by many other Socialist men. While they paid tribute to an ideal of woman as the oppressed preserver of communal virtue, they simultaneously ridiculed the actual lives of bourgeois women as the epitome of capitalist waste and hypocrisy. The most energetic contempt and derisive humour of Socialist polemics were often reserved for 'the slaves of fashion', middle-class women whose insatiable consumerism was the mainstay of capitalist factory production and the root of English philistinism.⁴ 'The shopping doll, the anti-social puppet, whose wires (well hidden under the garb of custom and fashion) are really pulled by self-indulge', were a familiar character in Socialist writing.⁵ Justice

¹ E. Belfort Bax, Reminiscences and Reflections of a Mid and Late Victorian, (London, 1918) p. 197.

² Freedom, V. 1, n. 11, Aug. 1887, p. 89.

³ H. M. Hyndman, Further Reminiscences, (Macmillan, London, 1912) p. 287.

⁴ See for example H. H. Champion, 'The Slave of Fashion', Justice, 16. Feb. 1884 and J. L. Mahon, 'Women under Capitalism', The Commonweal, 20. Dec. 1888.

⁵ K. Pearson, 'The Woman's Question', July, 1885, p. 377, Pearson Papers, Manuscript Room, University College London.

extended its contempt for bourgeois women to the social purity and property reform agitation. The 'egotistical' proponents of 'woman's rights' failed to recognise that only class war would bring true equality.¹ Women Socialists must have felt the contradiction as they dedicated themselves to a movement in which their own sex was alternately idealised and ridiculed.

A combination of outright misogyny and a more general refusal to take women's issues seriously, led some feminists to pose the question as to whether or not their concerns could ever be adequately addressed. The men and women of the movement were often talking right past each other when it came to the feminist meaning of Socialism. Emma Brooke was sure that Karl Pearson had missed the point of her paper on 'Women's Sphere in Modern Society'. 'But I think the misunderstanding lies where, between men and women, it always does lie - that is in the use of the same words with different meanings'.² Similar misunderstandings led Henrietta Muller to withdraw from the Men and Women's Club in 1888 and to start a women-only club. The club had originally been established in 1884 for 'the unreserved discussion of all matters....connected with the mutual position of men and women'.³ Anarchists like Charlotte Wilson regularly attended its meetings. Yet by 1888 these women felt that the men in the club had imposed their own definitions of 'emancipation' and 'moral': 'It was the same old story of the men laying down the law to the women and not caring to recognise that she has a voice, and the women resenting in silence, and submitting in silence'.⁴

During the pre-war period Anarchist women were less willing to 'submit in silence'. The feminism of the 1900's was not just a matter of economic independence or discussions on the origin and future of the family in abstract, as it was when Agnes Henry and her comrades were active in the 1880's and 1890's, but an opposition, both political

¹ *Justice*, 19. Jan, 1884.

² E. Brooke to K. Pearson, 14. March. 1886, List 10/28, PP.

³ Men and women's Club minutes, July. 1885, PP.

⁴ H. Muller to K. Pearson, 29. March. 1888, List 10/45, PP.

and cultural, to every aspect of patriarchal hegemony. The emergence of a more militant feminism with an autonomous organisational existence had a profound impact. It is likely that the mainstream of British Anarchism could not offer an adequate platform for this feminism, whereas it had been able to contain the pre-1900 version of Anarcho-feminism.¹ This was clearly demonstrated with the establishment of The Freewoman journal in 1911. By this time, female Anarchists found it necessary to have their own forum, since their concerns were not being addressed in the rest of the Anarchist press.

Although many women remained within the fold of the established Anarchist groups, the founding of the paper highlights a tension between feminism and an Anarchism that was productivist and masculine. Some feminists have indeed noted the lack of concern with household democracy which characterised Anarcho-syndicalist reformers who emphasised workplace democracy. They exclusively expressed a masculinist perspective, the viewpoint of the male worker.² In the post-1900 period the Anarcho-syndicalist current sought social change through economic revolution, with the assumption that women, like men, would be liberated along with the sites of production. This analysis went largely uncriticised within the established Anarchist media during the 1908-1914 period. The result was that a separation between the sphere in which the revolution would occur and the sphere in which most women worked was created. For feminists however, such a narrow

¹ Several Anarchist women were however hostile to the suspicion of men which prevailed amongst Anarcho-feminists and criticised any moves towards separation. They were more concerned to emphasise the unity of class interests between men and women. Lily Gair Wilkinson opposed what she felt was the feminist idealisation of women as a group, the 'angelic sisterhood'. Denying the existence of 'two armies of opposing sexes', she focused instead on 'the two armies of opposing classes'. L. Gair Wilkinson, Women's Freedom, (Freedom Press, London, 1914), pp. 2, 8. Her views were not an exception, Emma Goldman also opposed any separation on the part of feminists. Goldman was convinced that feminism could not develop an adequate theory and praxis of liberation in isolation from the larger struggle for human liberation. She wrote: 'My quarrel with the feminists...is that most of them see their slavery apart from the rest of the human family'. Goldman believed that 'regardless of all artificial boundary lines between woman's rights and man's rights...there is a point where these differentiations may meet and grow into one perfect whole'. E. Goldman, Anarchism and Other Essays, (Dover, New York, 1969), p. 213.

² C. Pateman, The Disorder of Women, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 132.

focus did not show that a more inclusive democratic focus transcending masculinism was not a valid objective.¹

The Freewoman first appeared in November 1911 and from its outset was envisaged as a platform for debate. Dora Marsden was the main force behind the paper. Formerly an organiser of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), by the time of the paper's foundation she was a convinced Anarchist.² Marsden's dissatisfaction with suffrage politics and the neglect of other issues was forcefully conveyed in a number of attacks on the militancy of the WSPU, which was relying on men to emancipate women. To Marsden the paper was concerned with real emancipation: 'what [woman] may become. Our interest is in the Freewoman herself, her psychology, philosophy, morality and achievements'.³ She saw women themselves as responsible for their emancipation - an emancipation held back in part by women's own cowardice. Women must give up the protection of men and take their place in the world as breadwinners; with the re-design of housing, the introduction of nurseries, the collectivisation of cooking and cleaning, even those with children would be able to go out to work. Although directed against the WSPU, her comments also presented an attack on the Anarchists. For example, The Freewoman published articles rarely addressed in the mainstream Anarchist press, on housework, motherhood, sexuality and theories of art and literature in relation to women.⁴ A Freewoman Discussion Circle was also started in 1912. Françoise Lafitte recalled that the 'meetings were naturally opened to both sexes, and...one felt there was a more

¹ See for example Freedom, V. 27, n. 285, Jan. 1913, p. 1. The British experience was not unique. Martha Ackelsberg for example, has examined the difficult development of an Anarcho-feminist current within and alongside established Anarcho-syndicalist institutions in Spain. In the same vein, a study of the CGT in northern France, demonstrates that there was a clear hostility to the presence of women at Syndicate activities. See M. Ackelsberg, Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991) and P. Hilden, Working Women and Socialist Politics in France, 1880-1914: a Regional Study, (Oxford University Press, 1986).

² L. Garner, A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden 1882-1961, (Avebury, Aldershot, 1990), pp. 94-5.

³ The Freewoman, 23. Nov. 1911, p. 3.

⁴ See for example Rose Witcop's article 'Sex and Drama', in Ibid., 18. April. 1912, p. 437.

fundamental equality between men and women than in the world at large, or in the ranks of the Socialists and the Suffragettes'.¹

Women's Work.

For many Socialists productive labour was one of the most important human activities. Socialists looked to a new relation between humans and their worldly work to revive both communal solidarity and a true sense of aesthetics. For Wilson 'the expenditure of energy in creation, in productive work, is a natural human impulse....starvation of the impulse to work is a physical misery, just like starvation of the impulse to eat'.² Liberty of labour produced craftsmanship as well as social wealth, for 'work which is the result of free choice is best done'.³ Anarcho-feminists therefore argued and organised for the economic independence of women, suggesting that a key factor in their commitment to Socialism was their belief that it provided the surest means for women 'to escape the maddening irritation of enforced idleness' and to become part of the labouring community. 'Only when she is economically free', wrote Agnes Henry 'can [woman] hope to obtain a position of personal independence and social equality with men'.⁴

However, the labouring man of Socialist iconography, with his bulging biceps wielding a forge hammer in one arm and sheltering a woman and child in the other, expressed an ideal of labour that for many Socialists was incompatible with the notion of women as workers. While Socialist theorists elevated the manual labourer to unprecedented heights in communal esteem, Socialist politicians confronted the practical reality of the working-class male undercut and alienated by women's lower wages. The Socialist message would not sell well among the male working-class so long as it included a call for economic independence for women. The female worker posed a threat to male freedom in

¹ F. Delisle, *Friendship's Odyssey*, (William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1946), p. 181. A French Anarchist, Lafitte was the daughter of an architect. She taught at a school in England from 1906 to 1910, returned to France, but came back the following year to escape her mother's attempts to marry her off. After the First world war she became the partner of Havelock Ellis.

² *Freedom*, V. 2, n. 21, July, 1888, p. 71.

³ *The Commonweal*, 9, June, 1888.

⁴ *Freedom*, V. 6, n. 64, March, 1892, p. 23.

the sphere of wage labour and to the order of the private household based on the husband's economic dominance.¹ The conflict over female work was present from the start of the British labour movement.² Early on in the trade union movement, the male worker's right to 'a family wage', which assumed the exclusion of women from paid employment, emerged as an important bargaining point. In 1877, Henry Broadhurst, the secretary of the TUC won applause when he defined the aim of the labour movement as 'to bring about a condition of things, where wives could be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood against the great and strong men of the world'.³

Female labour was a key issue in the 1880's Socialist revival, as its leadership divided between those whose heroic workers were both women and men, and those who looked to Socialism to return women to their 'natural' domestic sphere. The issue appeared in a debate launched by Charlotte Wilson in *Justice*. Its editor Hyndman, aimed for the allegiance of the male working-class. He accordingly supported Marx's assumption of the family wage, set by the cost of the worker reproducing himself and his family. Hyndman backed the male Weavers Association in their strike against the employment of women at Kidderminster in 1884. He endorsed their efforts, noting that 'it is the rule in all factory industry that women's and children's labour tends to displace that of men and thus to break up family life as well as to reduce wages'.⁴ In the next issue Wilson called the editor's attention to the fact that 'you apparently exclude women from the category of workers'.

I submit that in the case in question, women are to be considered in every sense as much "workers" as men, seeing that they have actually been

¹ See B. Harrison and H. Mockett, 'Women in the factory: the state and factory legislation in 19th century Britain', in L. Jamieson and H. Corr (eds), *State, Private Life and Political Change*, (Macmillan, London, 1990).

² While the middle-class Owenites had few problems with the idea of female economic freedom, the more working-class Chartists considered women workers to be a violation of 'the natural order'. See B. Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Virago, London, 1983), p. 268.

³ J. Lewis, 'The Working Class Wife and Mother and State Intervention: 1870-1918', in J. Lewis, (ed), *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 103.

⁴ *Justice*, 1. March. 1884.

engaged in the same sort of industrial operation, and further, that this work is a direct advantage to the community, economically speaking.¹

Wilson admitted the problem of women's lower wages, but argued that 'instead of agitating for this indiscriminate dismissal', the weavers should encourage the women to organise and demand equal pay. Wilson assumed that the women would form their own union rather than be welcomed into the men's, but she urged the male weavers to see the women's interests as 'identical with their own' and 'to consolidate the ranks of the workers', rather than divide them. She concluded by protesting 'against the classification of the labour of women and of children under one heading' objecting to Hyndman's inclusion of defenceless children in the same class as women 'who, as fully developed human beings, deliberately choose an occupation, and are not only theoretically capable of self-protection, but are beginning to show themselves practically so by the promotion of unions for the purpose'. Hyndman responded by admitting that after the revolution, women could perhaps work a few hours a day in 'a well-ventilated and nicely decorated factory' without doing harm to their maternal duties and reproductive capacities, but that women workers in the present were 'a curse to the country':

Women's labour is harmful to the men who are their husbands and brothers, by cutting down their wages, and throwing them out of work; is injurious to themselves by lowering their strength and spoiling their beauty; and is utterly ruinous to the children who are neglected and half-fed.²

Other readers joined the debate. H. H. Clarke made the point that most women worked because they had to and that poverty was far more injurious to their health and 'beauty' than wage work. By catering to male prejudice, Clarke maintained, Hyndman was 'sacrificing to a miserable opportunism one of the most precious principles of socialism -

¹ Ibid., 8. March. 1884.

² Ibid., 22. March. 1884. As Hyndman's comments demonstrate, the image of the female industrial worker violated the male Socialist sense of feminine beauty and sensitivity, an ideal they hoped would be realised in the Socialist future. William Morris's opposition to female employment was probably due to this romantic view of women. The hard physical labour of his Socialist utopia was done by men, while women cooked, served and 'scattered little twigs of lavender and other sweet-smelling herbs about the floor'. W. Morris, 'News From Nowhere', The Commonweal, 12. July. 1890.

the absolute equality of rights of all women and men'. Hyndman replied that Socialism's call for equality was never meant to include the 'natural' inequalities between men and women.¹

Anarcho-feminists restated the position adopted by Wilson, claiming that all Socialists were 'advocates of the equal claims of each man and woman to work for the community as seems good to him or her'.² Legislation which prevented women working in trades such as mining, and which limited the hours they could work sharpened the debate. To many reformers, such legislation as the 1886 Mines Regulation Bill, which prohibited the employment of women at the pit brow, was protective, since it would 'prevent the deterioration of the race', as well as protecting male wages.³ For many women however, it was viewed as restrictive. Agnes Henry supported the pit brow women and argued that physically demanding labour was beneficial rather than damaging to female health: 'The work of a pit-girl may be dirty and hard', but it rightfully deprives her husband of his 'dependent domestic serf' and gives her a 'healthier life and one more worthy of a human being than most of the fine ladies who live on her labour'. Henry's feminist opposition to the law overlapped with her Anarchist objection to any increase in the state's regulatory powers:

What claim have any class or section of the community to forcibly decide for another what is or is not a "suitable" occupation? Have our Radical fellow-workers found the legislation of capital for labour such an unmixed blessing that they set about the analogous business of the legislation of men for women?⁴

Anarcho-feminists clearly believed that any regulation singling out women for special treatment amounted to economic discrimination.

The debate over women's work was carried out mostly in the context of industrial employment and working-class women. Middle-class women advocated the rights of

¹ *Justice*, 5. April. 1884.

² *Freedom*, V. 1, n. 1, Oct. 1886, p. 2.

³ *The Practical Socialist*, Jan. 1887.

⁴ *Freedom*, V. 1, n. 10, July. 1887, p. 63.

working-class women and provided the leadership of the women's trade union movement.¹

An equally contentious theme was the expectation that Socialism would remove the barriers to economic independence for bourgeois women as well. Everything female Anarchists wrote and said about the frustrations and emptiness of middle-class life, was doubly applicable to the lives of middle-class women. More so than men, bourgeois women were denied satisfaction 'of one of our strongest, most persistent impulses.....to do, to act, to make something, to express ourselves in some course of action, some process of thought, the fashioning of some material object which seems to fulfil a purpose of use or beauty'.²

Middle-class female Anarchist writings were full of the moral and aesthetic virtues of work. Yet, Victorian society offered few opportunities for the type of work they romanticised.³

Those individualist Anarcho-feminists who believed that competition among equals was the engine of social progress, were told as women and potential mothers that they should not compete in the labour market. This advice often came from their Socialist comrades. While Karl Pearson theoretically supported the economic independence of women, he felt that scientific research should first be done to determine whether women's labour would be damaging to the race. Pearson also assumed that child-bearing women would always be economically dependent. Furthermore, he believed that 'race-evolution has implanted in women a desire for children'. If this was true, 'race evolution' had created an insurmountable barrier to women's freedom.⁴ Wilson was no less concerned with the survival of the race, but was reluctant to accept that women's subjection was required. She felt that Pearson seriously overstated women's natural desire for motherhood:

For ages [women] have been educated to concentrate their whole attention upon this question of marriage and children....With some it is an intense

¹ B. Drake, *Women in Trade Unions* (Virago Press, London, 1984). Middle-class Anarchist feminists played a part in this development. Gertrude Schack, Edith Lupton and Florence Dryhurst were all active in the Women's Educational Union which sought to organise the women workers of East London. See *Freedom*, V. 5, n. 32, Feb. 1891, p. 14.

² *Freedom*, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, V. 6, n. 64, March, 1892, p. 23.

⁴ K. Pearson, 'The Woman's Question', July, 1885, MSS, PP, UCL.

passion and they are marked out by nature as the mothers of the community; but if motherhood were understood clearly, as it ought, to be a matter of deliberate choice and not the haphazard result of marriage, I believe that something less than half the women of England would care to undertake the responsibility.

If it seemed that all women longed to be mothers, it was only because those who preferred not to 'rarely express themselves on this point....especially in the presence of men, who are supposed to admire the opposite'.¹

Although Anarcho-feminists believed that women had to become part of the labouring community, they were swimming against the tide in the peak years of the Victorian romance with motherhood.² Pearson's assumption of a universal maternal instinct was the consensus view. It was not surprising therefore, that some Anarchists supported a more maternalistic feminism which did not emphasise economic independence. The focus on a productivist dignity of labour reflected Wilson's middle-class idealisation of the world of work and her ignorance of the lives of working-class women. She sought to abandon the feminine and private world of home and family in order to embrace an unknown world, the masculine and public world of work. However, the argument that exclusion from labour made for a life of idleness was not a thought that would have crossed the minds of housebound working-class Anarchist women who hardly wanted any more work to do. Middle-class Anarcho-feminists could demand work and an end to idleness since they belonged to households with servants. This middle-class view was therefore challenged by a maternalist version of feminism in which a properly resourced devotion to motherhood and homemaking, alongside an equal relationship between the sexes, could have its own dignity. This form of feminism was more suited to the world of the working-class wife, who often shared her partner's desire for a secure family wage.³

¹ C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 8. Aug. 1885, PP, List 900.

² *Freedom*, V, 24, n. 256, Aug. 1910, p. 63.

³ Indeed, for many women, housework and motherhood was itself a full time job. They were responsible for the management of the household budget, for the rearing of children, for health care and the maintenance of neighbourhood networks which were often critical to family survival. Women, as mothers, were critical in protecting their households from the worst hardships of industrial capitalism. Such women had a respected and responsible position in the working-class

The Sheffield Anarchists were very much concerned with the experiences of working-class mothers and sought to address their problems, although often in an abstract and male defined way. In an article entitled 'Woman and the Family' they recognised the family's role in defending people against the external ravages of the cash-nexus, it was a 'green spot in the desert of our present society....a little community where each one works according to his strength and consumes according to his needs'. The article was aware of the woman's labour in the family. 'If we should try to measure the value of the work done for the family by the mother, after the rules of political economy, the price would not be estimated'. The Sheffield Anarchists were concerned that women support the struggles of their male partners, and do this from the home, rather than by demanding work for themselves.¹

Louise Michel was equally opposed to the idea of women demanding the right to work: 'You're the ones who bear the responsibility of family and home, while men are responsible for work outside the home....Once you are free, you must no longer deform your natural attributes, nor spend twelve....hours a day in the workshops'. Her longed for form of social organisation would not require women to leave their homes. Men would be able to supply the family's needs.² Emma Goldman held similar views, asking: 'how much independence is gained if the narrowness and lack of freedom of the home is exchanged for the narrowness and lack of freedom of the factory....A so-called independence which leads only to earning the merest subsistence is not so enticing, not so ideal, that one could expect woman to sacrifice everything for it'. In a plea for the protection of 'women's nature' that would have shocked Charlotte Wilson, she maintained:

Our highly praised independence is, after all, but a slow process of dulling and stifling of woman's nature, her love instinct and her mother instinct.

community. See E. Ross, Love and Toil, Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918. (Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹ The Sheffield Anarchist, 19. July. 1891.

² E. Thomas, Louise Michel, (Black Rose, Montreal, 1980), p. 294. See also The Commonwealth, V. 4, n. 152, 8. Dec. 1888, p. 389. Michel's view of female labour was characteristic of French Anarchism in general, 'which did not condemn the dominant cult of home and hearth, but rather condemned capitalism for betraying it'. Hutton, 'Camille Pissarro's Turpitudes Sociales', p. 35.

Nevertheless, the position of the working girl is far more natural than that of her seemingly more fortunate sister in the more cultured professional walks of life – teachers, physicians, lawyers, engineers, etc., who have to make a dignified, proper appearance, while the inner life is growing empty and dead.¹

Views such as this are antipathetic to contemporary feminism, but, if analysed within the context of nineteenth century culture, are more difficult to dismiss. Indeed, many nineteenth century feminists based their arguments on similar notions of difference, stressing women's unique domestic role. Many of the women who organised in support of the labour movement, did so in order to bolster, not to undermine domestic ideology.²

Motherhood and childcare

Although some Anarchists were clearly interested in developing a well-resourced devotion to motherhood, Anarcho-feminist views on child rearing varied. As Greenway has noted, some believed that 'women's freedom meant the freedom to fulfil herself as a mother, with a natural responsibility for childrearing'.³ Wilson, Guillaume-Schack, Shaw, Goldman, Glair-Wilkinson and Bevington were however, never mothers. This may have been a deliberate choice given the nature of their views on the subject of maternity.⁴ Those women who were childless preferred a fuller measure of independence to motherhood, and presumably enjoyed the co-operation of their partners. Certainly several women who were sexually involved with men and wished to remain politically active chose not to have children. Wilson, Goldman, Bevington and Shaw were in their late 20s and early 30s, an age Victorians presumed to be the beginning of the end of women's reproductive years, when they began their active periods as propagandists. Goldman expressly considered her

¹ 'The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation', in Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, pp. 216-17. See also L. Gair Wilkinson, *Women's Freedom*. (Freedom Press, London, 1914, pp. 8-9

² This was certainly the case with the Women's Labour League. See C. Colette, *For Labour and for Women: The Women's Labour League: 1906-18*, (Manchester University Press, 1989).

³ Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', p. 43

⁴ See Wilson's comments above, p. 11

political activities a noble substitute for motherhood, although there were times in her life when she longed for a child.¹

Most Anarchist women believed that women had the right to bear children outside marriage. When she was in jail in 1914, Lilian Wolfe applied to have her baby in Queen Charlotte's Hospital, but the authorities refused because she was an unrepentant sinner who intended to live with the baby's father afterwards. 'I certainly was one of the first single women to have a baby deliberately', she recalled.² A few women went further than this, arguing for women's right to choose to have children outside an ongoing relationship: 'As a freewoman', wrote one Anarcho-feminist, 'I refuse to bear children either to the state or to a man; I will bear them for myself and for my purpose....My children shall be mine for my pleasure, until such time as they shall be their own for their own pleasure'.³ Françoise Lafitte agreed: 'Women may claim children without a man, in spite of man, apart from his so-called chivalry, which feeds her and her little children only to keep her enslaved'.⁴

On the other hand, another Anarcho-feminist wrote: 'Men must do child rearing if they are to become complete human beings instead of mere males, if children are to have the benefit of fathering as well as mothering, and if there is to be equality between the sexes'.⁵ This was a rare viewpoint and despite the impressive rhetoric, most frequently male Anarchists retreated to cultural orthodoxy in their domestic relationships. As of the early 1890's, Jewish men were the only males Emma Goldman had met who in the home,

¹ C. Falk, Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1984).p. 51.

² Interview with L. Wolfe by S. Rowbotham in Wildcat, n. 6, March. 1975.

³ The Freewoman, V. 1, n. 15, 29. Feb. 1912.

⁴ T. Thompson, (ed.), Dear Girl: the Diaries and Letters of Two Working Women, 1897-1917, (The Women's Press, London, 1987). p. 160. Lafitte's outlook was no doubt shaped by her own experience. In September 1912 she met Syndicalist John Collier, fell in love and went to live with him in a free union. The relationship quickly turned sour and she left, but not before coming pregnant. Her own experience no doubt convinced her that women could raise children without male interference. Delisle, Friendship's Odyssey, p. 187.

⁵ The Freewoman, V. 1, n. 17, 14. March. 1912.

practised the 'equality of sexes' ideal which they preached.¹ Judy Greenway has argued that there is little evidence that male Anarchists played much of a role in bringing up children.² This certainly seems to have been the case for younger children, although some men did help educate older children alongside their female comrades.³

The Family and Marriage

Susan Hinely has demonstrated how many late 19th century intellectuals placed sexual relations at the centre of their theories of history. Darwin's theory of evolution, fuelled by sexual selection, was a subject of study for Anarchists, including the implication that women were less 'evolved' due to their 'passive' role in the process. Herbert Spencer, more explicit than Darwin about the evolutionary roots of woman's contemporary status, maintained that sexual difference was a consequence of the early arrest of women's development in order to conserve energy for reproduction; highly differentiated sex roles indicated a highly developed society. 'Power over children was the root of the old conception of power', wrote Professor Maine in a study that linked the patriarchal family and the emergence of the nation state.⁴ Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) argued that the social organisation of any particular historical era was determined by the stage of development of production and by the structure of the family. His analysis of early society borrowed from the work of Bachofen, whose *Das Mutterrecht* (1861) provided intellectuals with the concept of matriarchy, an historical period in which women were at the centre of power and culture due to their immediate relation to their offspring. According to Bachofen, the succession of patriarchy was a radical intellectual advance for society, as a culture based on the physical love between mother and child was replaced by the more abstract valuation

¹ E. Goldman, *Living My Life*, V. 1, (Dover, New York, 1970), p. 93

² Greenway, 'Sex, Politics and Housework', p. 43

³ *The Torch*, no. 12, (New Series), 18 May, 1895, p.14

⁴ S. Hinely, *Charlotte Wilson: Anarchist, Fabian and Feminist*, (PhD, Stanford University, 1987), p. 34.

of the father for his progeny. With patriarchy began the capacity for devotion to abstract concepts like the family and the state.

The Socialist debate was conducted largely under the assumption that universal matriarchy preceded the current rule of men. Freedom summarised the work of Morgan and others who had shown that 'sex relations have played as fundamental a part as economic relations in social evolution'.¹ The study of matriarchy provided access to the nature of primitive communism, an era before the introduction of property and individualism. 'The world historical defeat of women' occurred with the overthrow of the matriarchal gens, a process inextricable from the introduction of law and government: 'The state arises on the ruins of the gentile constitution'.² Though Engels' history of the family was not available in English until the 20th century, his ideas were being discussed in radical circles alongside the similar theories of August Bebel.³ This led many to the question Pearson raised: 'With the centuries as the patriarchate vanishes, when a new form of possession is coming into existence, is it rational to suppose history will break a hitherto invariable law, and a new sex-relationship will not replace the old?'⁴ Those who speculated on the nature of future sexual relations, agreed that the issue was crucial, not necessarily from a concern for the emancipation of women, but from a scientific interest in the reproductive structure evolution required.

¹ Freedom, V. 3, n. 25, Oct. 1888, p. 1.

² F. Engels, The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State. (1884; reprint, International Publishers, New York, 1972), pp. 50, 154.

³ See for example Eleanor Marx Aveling's review of Bebel's work in The Commonweal, V. 1, n. 6, July. 1885, pp. 63-4. It is worth noting here however, that although works of Anarchist anthropology and ethnology - notably Elie Reclus' Les Primitifs (1885) and Kropotkin's Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (1888) - were drawn from exactly the same sources as Engels' Origins of the Family, the Anarchist works consistently omitted the concept of a pre-class matriarchy. Kropotkin, in fact, denied that any such formation had ever existed. Despite the stance of the leading male theorists, Anarchist feminists were nevertheless well aware of the ideas of Morgan and his associates. This was certainly the case with women like Wilson and Dryhurst who would have come across their work at the Men's and Women's Club. References to the matriarchate were frequent in the meetings of the club and were utilised by feminists in their journalism. See for example 'The Marriage Controversy', which drew on the work of Morgan and Maine. Freedom, V. 25, Oct. 1888, p. 1.

⁴ To-Day, Feb. 1887.

Anarcho-feminist speculations on the future of the family predicted a reproductive arrangement that would be both liberating for women and eugenically sound. Charlotte Wilson picked up where the 17th century philosophers left off, identifying the roots of political authority in the family. Filmer, not Locke, drew the honest picture of family life when he justified the divine right of kings from the father's power in the home. Paternal authority lay the seed for 'the spirit of domination and the habit of domineering' in the larger society. In the modern family, the husband's 'will and word are the law of the household':

He has the patria-potestas on which the whole Roman civil law and the derivative jurisprudence of modern states are founded. The land, the house, the wife and children are his....He, like Louis XIV, is the state....The father who is lord and master seeks to be the father of two or more families. He becomes the chief, the king. Moved by the same spirit and habit now grown inveterate, the tribal chiefs go to war in the hope of coming home bigger fathers....Here is the school of Greek slave-owning Republic, medieval serfdom, and of the present hypocrisy which calls itself civilisation.

Once permitted in the family, the dominating spirit propagates itself throughout society. Once legitimised in politics through the state, it prevents the natural development of the family into its next and final form: 'A society of free equals, of friendly men and women, who know how to give and take, understand sharing and the community of work, rest and enjoyment'. The children of the future will be educated in independence that they may 'enter the commune, where their brothers and sisters, awaiting their coming, are free and a law unto themselves'. Wilson's vision of Anarchism was a society composed of these primary clusters of freedom: 'The final stage of family life is the first form of social life....This autonomous commune of autonomous units, the springs of whose life are in reasonable good will, is Anarchism realised. Anarchy is just, reasonable and kind home-rule'.¹

¹ The Anarchist, V. 1, n. 14, 20. April. 1886, p. 2.

The unity of family and society, the 'softening and shading of the edge of division between family life and the common life' was a persistent theme in Anarcho-feminist theory. It dovetailed with their support for women's economic independence. Women's wage labour did indeed break up the family, but 'after all, this is the great point....It is a necessary step towards the realisation of a free socialism that men and women alike should learn to recognise their direct relation to society; to live and work directly for the commonwealth'.¹ The goal was not a return to matriarchy, a dated form in the march of history, but instead the joining of matriarchy's communalism, enforced only by public opinion, with 'the individualising process' that marked the modern era.² The process was finally reaching women, as shown by their entrance into the world of education and labour. At the centre of many Anarcho-feminists' evolutionary theory was a picture of the future woman, already present in society and struggling 'in the darkness against the outworn forms that crush her back'.³

For Anarcho-feminists the principal 'outworn form' hindering the healthy evolution of the family was the institution of marriage. On this issue they could tap into a strong current of public opinion which was concerned with marriage. In August 1888 for example, the Daily Telegraph requested its readers' response to the question 'Is Marriage a Failure?' Over the next month the paper received 27,000 replies. Although support for marriage was declared by a few, the majority revealed discontent and profound unhappiness. The correspondents usually blamed their individual spouses, but their complaint of difficulties in extricating themselves from bad marriages demonstrated their more general dissatisfaction with marriage as an institution.⁴ Daily Telegraph readers were not alone in their ambivalence towards marriage. Feminists had been criticising it for some

¹ Freedom, V. 2, n. 10, July. 1887, p. 63.

² C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 28. Feb. 1889, PP, List 900, UCL.

³ Freedom, V. 3, n. 25, Oct. 1888, p. 2.

⁴ Cited in J. Walkowitz, 'Science, Feminism and Romance: the Men and Women's Club, 1885-1889', History Workshop Journal, 21, April, 1986, pp. 37-59.

years, not so much in a general sense, but in terms of its injustices: a woman's economic dependency, loss of legal and political rights, an unequal divorce law and the assumption of a husband's ownership of his wife.¹ It was, above all, a married woman's right over her own person that needed to be won, and it was this which became the main focus for feminists in their discussion of marriage.²

Despite their criticism of marriage, most feminists were opposed to the formation of free unions and looked instead to reformed legal marriage since they feared such 'lawless' unions would allow men unrestrained sexual licence and would thereby render women more vulnerable. Until men's sexual impulses had been curbed, marriage law at least gave some women protection; given the reality of the double moral standard, it was better to increase rather than decrease the taboo against non-marital sex. If feminists were primarily opposed to free unions on the grounds of female vulnerability, the question of respectability came a close second. An unrespectable woman implied a woman with a 'reputation'.

It is thus perhaps explicable why many feminists looked aghast at those women who entered free unions, fearing that scandal of impropriety would harm the 'woman's cause'. Although for most feminists who supported free unions, the notion of free love was one of monogamy and, if love persisted, permanence, the term always had negative connotations, being equated with promiscuity and polygamy, so that sometimes an advocate of 'free unions' could argue that this did not mean she supported 'free love'. Wilson for example, sensed the threat to the free love issue posed by the theories of James Hinton, a prophet of polygamous free unions.³ Perhaps fearful of the public reaction, she wanted no connection between Anarchism and Hintonism, despite the latter's thoroughly

¹ J. Lewis, Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change. (Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1984), p. 78.

² Freedom, V, 20, n. 212, Nov. 1906, p. 38.

³ S. Rowbotham and J. Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. (Pluto Press, London, 1977), pp. 143-5.

Anarchist call for the abolition of all laws and restrictions on sexuality. Wilson insisted that Hintonism was in 'complete contradiction' to Anarchism.¹ She assumed, as did many other Anarchists, that free sexual relations would foster, rather than defeat fidelity:

If the relations between men and women were perfectly free, I think so far from conducting to loose living such a state of society would be the best safe-guard against it. Having many friends on whom they were on terms of intimate affection, women would be in far less danger of mistaking fancy or friendship for love of another sort, and would give themselves to a lover far less readily than now.²

The greatest advocate of free love was the Legitimation League which was set up in 1893 'for the purpose of changing the bastardy laws so that offspring born out of wedlock were not deprived of their rightful inheritances'.³ Partly contingent on legal change, this was not an Anarchist goal as such, but the polemics that this issue sparked off about legal marriage attracted Anarchist attention.⁴ This interest grew after 1897, when the league adopted as its primary aim the education of public opinion 'in the direction of freedom in sexual relationships'. The issue of illegitimacy was relegated to second place.⁵ Anarchist members included Wordsworth Donisthorpe, John Badcock, Greevz Fisher, Voltarine de Cleyre, Auberon Herbert and Henry Seymour. With its new aim blazoned, the League launched its journal The Adult, in the same year. It was anxious to dispel any fears that support for free love would be at a woman's expense: 'One of the fundamentals of our position is the equal sex freedom of man and woman. "Free love" for one sex at the

¹ C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 21. Feb. 1886, List 900, PP, UCL. Her objection to Hintonism was probably reinforced by the experience her friend Emma Brooke had undergone when she met Hinton. Apparently, Hinton tried to convert her to his sexual theories and in the process made an attempt to seduce her. His efforts to 'force caresses and favours from a shrinking and terrified girl' were unsuccessful, as Brooke recounted it, but the experience left her with a strong opinion of Hinton and his ideas. 'It does not take so much to confuse the ideas of right and wrong in a girl's head and to set her out in life with the persuasion that to "sacrifice" herself for a man she loves is at once ennobling and necessary. But this was Hinton's method with girls and while seducing their minds with splendid talk, he helped himself liberally to such favours as he could get'. E. Brooke to K. Pearson, 4. Dec. 1885, PP, UCL.

² Freedom, V. 1, n. 7, April, 1887, p. 28.

³ Liberty, 17. June. 1893, p. 3.

⁴ Voltarine de Cleyre, the American Anarchist feminist remarked that: 'At first the names of legitimation and Anarchism do not seem to mix well together, but on coming to an acquaintance with the...present purpose of the league, the innocuousness of the title and the real value of the society appears'. Freedom, V. 12, n. 126, May. 1898, p. 26.

⁵ The Adult, V. 2, n. 8, Sept. 1898.

expense of the other means neither freedom nor love'.¹ Although it is clear that not all members were supportive of feminism, the League's formal commitment was explicit. The Adult's editor, George Bedborough assured readers: 'The League holds to the precious principle that a woman belongs to herself, that neither priest nor lawyer has any right to dictate to her'. And in The Adult's first issue it was stated that 'we protest...against the theory underlying laws, marriage settlements and popular practice that a woman's person can be the "property" of her husband'.² It appears that about half of its members were women, as were the holders of official posts. The League's treasurers were both women, and its president from 1897 was the American Anarchist feminist Lillian Harman.³ According to Inspector Sweeney, who had infiltrated the organisation, the League had 'a large and influential membership', containing many Anarchists.⁴

The Adult's editor may have been convinced that feminism and free love were reconcilable, but not all its members were so sure. In addition to a woman's economic vulnerability within a free union, several women elaborated upon the effects of lost respectability. A woman labelled a 'free lover' was likely to have been slandered not simply as 'sinner' for living with a man outside wedlock, but also as a 'promiscuous woman', sexually available to all.⁵ That free love gave all men potential property rights in a woman's sexuality was an idea held to even by certain League members. J. C. Spence objected to free love because 'the idea that we are to share the woman we love with other men is repulsive'.⁶ Harman recounted a talk given by W. M Thompson, to a recent gathering of the league in which he had asserted that 'freedom in love is impracticable

¹ Ibid., V. 1, n. 10, Oct. 1897.

² Shafts, April, 1897, p. 125. The Adult, V. 1, n. 6, June. 1897.

³ Harman had been imprisoned in Chicago for living with the father of her illegitimate child. She was also co-editor of the Anarchist paper Lucifer.

⁴ J. Sweeney, At Scotland Yard: Being the Experience during 27 Years' Service of John Sweeney, Late Detective Inspector, (Grant Richards, London, 1904), pp. 178, 182.

⁵ Mary Reed told readers 'to my mind "free love" offers no honourable or happy solution to the woman. It certainly leaves her freedom, but at the cost of what makes life endurable - the respect of the men and women of character whom she admires'. The Adult, V. 2, n. 8, Aug. 1898.

⁶ L. Bland, Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914, (Penguin, London, 1995), p. 158.

because no man can love and respect a woman who is the “common property of the herd”. To Harman, Thompson seemed to possess ‘a hazy conception of what Free Love means. It is impossible for him to realise that a woman may be the property of herself’.¹ Indeed, a woman’s desire to be her own person, free to enter a relationship in which no man held property rights in her sexuality, was at the heart of why women supported free unions. But women feared that the support of at least some men for free love was motivated by the potential sexual access to more than one woman, and the avoidance of financial responsibilities. If Spence and Thompson are anything to go by, men’s objection to free love was in terms of their disinclination to give up sole ownership rights in a woman’s body.

When The Adult’s London office displayed Havelock Ellis’s Sexual Inversion for sale in late 1897, the League hit the headlines. The book had only been out a short while when Bedborough was arrested and tried for selling ‘a certain lewd, wicked, bawdy, scandalous libel’, namely Sexual Inversion. From Sweeney’s memoirs it is clear that the police were primarily concerned not so much with the banning of Ellis’s book as finding a means by which to destroy ‘a growing evil in the shape of a vigorous campaign of free love and Anarchism’, namely the League.² They succeeded. Sweeney disclosed that the public prosecutor was only too anxious to co-operate in order ‘to protect the public from all the objectionable features of an open and unashamed free-love movement’.³ And since Bedborough pleaded guilty, the book, undefended, was labelled scandalous and obscene. Seymour, as a champion of free thought, established a free press defence committee to defend Bedborough.⁴ Bedborough was bound over and soon renounced any connection

¹ The Adult, V. 2, n. 2, Feb. 1898, p. 32.

² Sweeney, At Scotland Yard, p. 186. This was certainly Seymour’s view: ‘It is surmised that the attack upon the book is merely an insidious attempt to crush the Legitimation League, the active spirit of which Mr Bedborough has undoubtedly been’. H. Seymour to M. Nettlau, 9. June. 1898, List 229, NC, IISH.

³ Sweeney, At Scotland Yard, p. 180.

⁴ Its members included Edward Carpenter, Bernard Shaw, Walter Crane, G. W. Foote and George Jacob Holyoake. The Bedborough Case, (London, 1898).

with the League, which collapsed soon after. Sweeney noted with relief that Britain was saved from 'the growth of a Frankenstein monster wrecking the marriage laws of our country'.¹ Nevertheless, the League helped ensure that there grew a substantial portion of opinion which agreed that the marriage laws were oppressive.

The Anarchists argued that those who loved each other did not need legal compulsion to keep them united, while those who did not should not have it:

It is an intolerable impertinence that Church or State....should venture to interfere with lovers. If we were not accustomed to such a thing, it would appear unutterably disgusting. Even as it is, I should think very few in whom remains any sense of fraternal independence and self-respect, have suffered the infliction without a sense of outrage and indignity all the more bitter because it is a feeling which society will not allow to be expressed.

The 'idea that lovers would ever need to make a contract to manifest their love to each other [was] of course ridiculous'.² The only use of the contract of the marriage bond, 'was to insure cohabitation in case there is not sufficient love to insure it. All such cohabitation is....prostitution'.³ Similarly, Anarchists argued, the state could not change the moral nature of the sexual act: coitus was either good or bad in itself, regardless of the legal condition in which it occurred. The very presence of law in sexual relations perverted and concealed the bonds that naturally existed between lovers. Most devastating of all was the Anarchist claim that state interference impeded the natural sexual selection process on which evolutionary progress depended. 'Love should be the reason for union, not money or law, for love is the great regulator of the life of the race'.⁴

¹ Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard*, p. 189.

² C. Wilson to K. Pearson, 8. Aug. 1885, List 900, PP, UCL.

³ *The Anarchist*, V. 1, n. 1, March. 1885, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V. 1, n. 5, (n. 30, Old series) June, 1887. Anarchist feminists described the ideal relationship between the sexes as one based on love, sympathy, companionship, mutual responsibility, equality and above all, women's autonomy. The vision had its limitations however. An ideal of emotional blending or unity offered no practical help for the handling of emotional dependency within marriage. There was it seems, little recognition of the complexity of psychic structures. Further, it portrayed a very middle-class view of relationships, for as Ross demonstrates, many working-class women did not view marriage as, potentially or actually, involving romantic love or emotional intimacy; intimacy was confined to children, female kin and neighbours. See E. Ross, *Love and Toil, Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*, (Oxford University Press, 1993).

While the Anarchists may have lost ground in their struggle to define Socialism as a stateless society, they won a near total victory in identifying Revolutionary Socialism with the abolition of the law of matrimony.¹ Although for many non-Anarchist feminists free unions were largely something to be discussed in terms of a future goal, rather than something to be embarked on in the present, for the Anarchists it was necessary to try and live out the ideals of the future within the existing world. Inevitably, this put pressure on those who embarked on free unions. Paton recalled that he and his partner Jessie discussed living together without getting married: 'We were both without religious beliefs and contemptuous of convention, we subscribed to the ideal of "free union" of the sexes: legal ties were recognised to be a degradation of the ideal relation. But there was a prospect of children to be considered and we came to grip with realities'.² This was not an uncommon occurrence. In 1908 Guy Aldred and Rose Witcop also decided to live together without the sanction of Church or State. In 1909 however they eventually married, admitting that their free union was farcical given that they both used 'Mrs' when it was awkward to have done otherwise.³ The Anarchist emphasis on such heroic acts of defiance necessarily placed a great strain on people. The new morality was so completely at variance with the standard of the time that it was restricted to a minority even within the extreme left.⁴

¹ State Socialists joined the Anarchists in their attack on 'Christian property-marriage'. Eleanor Marx justified her and Edward Aveling's decision to live extramaritally as a rejection of state-sanctioned marriage and as an example of a union between a 'true husband and true wife': 'We have both felt that we were justified in setting aside all the false and really immoral bourgeois conventionalities'. Although Marx depicted her relationship as an example of a 'true' union, it should be stressed that Aveling did not live up to this high ideal. His frequent affairs and the total lack of morality in his private dealings were common knowledge within Socialist circles and may have helped drive Eleanor to commit suicide in 1898. Thompson, William Morris, pp. 370, 365-369.

² Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage, pp. 194-5.

³ J. T. Caldwell, Come Dungeons Dark: The Life and Times of Guy Aldred, Glasgow Anarchist, (Luath Press Ltd, Barr, Ayrshire, 1988), p. 90.

⁴ Public hostility was a very real concern. During our period those pioneering women who stepped outside the conventional norms of feminine sexual behaviour, by placing issues of sexual liberation at the core of their ideologies, were often branded as sexually deviant. This sometimes occurred not only because they discussed issues of sexual freedom, but simply because of their public activism. Often their opponents hurled epithets or launched investigations into their private lives in an effort to undermine their appeal. Louise Michel for example, was one Anarchist who suffered this fate. See M. Marmo Mullaney, 'Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel', in Signs, V. 15, n. 21, 1990, pp. 300-322.

Sexual Morality.

For Anarcho-feminists, issues of sexual morality in both public and private were inextricably linked. They recognised that the inter-relationship of the so called 'public woman', the prostitute and the 'private woman', the wife, - was reflected both by the ideology which reduced all women to mere physicality, and by the men who passed between them, sexually serviced in one quarter, 'morally' serviced in the other. There was a keen understanding that women in marriage and prostitution shared common concerns. The heart of the marriage bargain, it was argued, was the wife's promise of exclusive sexual availability. Here the comparison was obvious with the only other profession where women received economic benefits in exchange for sex. Female Anarchists often referred to the only two choices available to a sexually active women as 'married or unmarried prostitution'.¹

Prostitution was made a Socialist issue by the disclosures of W. T. Stead, who undertook an investigation into the vice trade in 1885. He presented his findings in a series of articles entitled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'. These caused an uproar and as a result a diverse alliance of radicals and philanthropists called for a 'war on vice'. This new movement managed almost immediately to force through the Criminal Law Amendment Act which raised the age of consent and tightened up the law on brothels.² The Socialist movement joined in the outcry against the 'white slave traffic' and took positions in the debate over the act. The SDF supported it,³ but the SL considered it irrelevant believing that 'the sexual corruption' of 'the children of the working class' inevitable 'so long as one class can buy the bodies of another, whether in the form of labour power or

¹ *Freedom*, V. 6, n. 69, Aug. 1892. See also *The Anarchist*, V. 1, n. 3, April. 1887, p. 7.

² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6. July. 1885, cited in D. Gorham, "'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-examined', *Victorian Studies*, Spring, 1978, pp. 353-79.

³ Although the SDF supported the act, Amie Hicks thought law alone could not end vice: 'so long as marriage is with the upper classes a matter of mere pecuniary convenience rather than of mutual affection' and 'so long as men believe - as many of them do - that women exist only to minister to their pleasure and passions'. *Justice*, 1. Aug. 1885.

sexual embraces'. Eleanor Marx predicted that the legislation would be used to harass rather than help the working-class, since 'we all know that laws are not applied equally'.¹

Charlotte Wilson opposed the Act, both as a feminist and an Anarchist. She denounced the legislation as a 'mere plaster' that hid but did not heal 'the sore' of sexual exploitation. The Act, argued Wilson, like all laws, would appease society's conscience, but leave the problem untouched, for no legislation could address the basic causes of prostitution. As an Anarchist Wilson had no reason to believe that the cure could be found in manmade law: 'The police and rulers of society have been shown to be so implicated in the evils complained of, that is surely the most errant folly to entrust them with the remedy'. Like most Socialists, Wilson addressed the economic causes first, but focused her analysis on the idleness of the monopolist, not on the poverty of the prostitute. The capitalist system created a class of wealthy, but bored men, who spent their time and money in a 'fevered search for new sensations'.²

A contributor to The Anarchist disagreed, arguing that whilst women were taught that it was 'honourable to sell their labour to a manufacturer or themselves to a man in marriage; it is vain to imagine that multitudes will not be induced by distaste for wage slavery, ignorance, flattery, or despair to submit to a deeper degradation....To treat [prostitution] as if it were the outcome of animal passions, to be restrained by appealing to the self-respect of socialised mankind is both to do it too much honour and to under state its strength'.³ Wilson however was less concerned with the economic causes than with the moral root of the problem, described as an absence of 'personal responsibility and of reverent regard for the rights of every individual'.⁴ Her concern for civil liberties was well founded. As Eleanor Marx predicted, the law was used to prosecute not the men who

¹ The Commonweal, V. 1, n. 8, Sept. 1885, p. 2.

² The Anarchist, V. 1, n. 6, Aug. 1885.

³ Ibid., V. 1, n. 5, July. 1885, p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., V. 1, n. 6, Aug. 1885.

bought sexual services, but the women who provided them.¹ Wilson's analysis of the law's broad powers registered her concern for the prostitutes themselves, but she seemed more concerned for the middle-class man who might be wrongly accused by 'meddling philanthropists'.

Wilson's essay was inconsistent throughout, but especially so in her recommended substitute for criminal punishment. Crossing the thin line between Anarchist individualism and right-wing libertarianism, with her concern for the wrongly accused forgotten, she advised the nation to exercise 'lynch law' on those who submitted to 'loathsome and unnatural desires'. She was however, more consistent in the list of 'immediate and active steps' she recommended for ending sexual exploitation. The first was 'the equal and common education of boys and girls', including 'physiological instruction' in the 'origins of life'.² In addition, girls should receive 'special training in independence in thought, and courage in action and in acts of self-defence, to counteract the cowardice and weakness engendered in women by ages of suppression and slavery'. Wilson also recommended schools 'to teach girls to gain their living independently' and women's trade unions to protect their interests. In her final recommendation, she urged the boycott of 'all employers on whose premises vice is deliberately encouraged' and the boycott of establishments where vice 'is rendered inevitable by starvation wages'.³

Female Sexuality

High on the agenda of the Anarcho-feminists was the demand for women's sexual pleasure and the destruction of the myth of female sexual passivity. They held that not only

¹ In co-operation with the National Vigilance Association, the enforcers of the Act shut down lodging-house brothels and accelerated the process of converting prostitution from a business centred in brothels run by madames to a street market dominated by male pimps. J. R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Virago, London, 1992), p. 125.

² For Wilson's arguments for a 'true and thorough physiological and moral sex education' see 'Sex Education Reform' *The Revolutionary Review*, V. 1, n. 9, Sept. 1889, pp. 136-7. A proper sex education would help end a situation in which 'girls are allowed to grow up in such utter ignorance of their physical nature that they become victims of the cruellest fate'.

³ *The Anarchist*, V. 1, n. 6, Aug. 1885.

should women be allowed to be sexual, but that sex was a natural function, needing frequent exercise like all natural functions, and thus as a corollary it was dangerous for women to repress their sexuality. Given that the Legitimation League advocated free love, some of its members, unsurprisingly, accepted the view that female chastity was injurious. Its journal The Adult was interested in the issue, advertising in one of its pamphlets a competition for 'the two best works on the psychological, physiological and pathological effects of celibacy on women'. Dora Kerr informed a League meeting that 'women suffer as much from enforced celibacy as men....We cannot suppress sex. If suppressed, it always takes some morbid form'.¹ Jane Clapperton, while merely declaring in 1885 that women's chastity not freely chosen....is a cruel lot, elaborated further in 1904: a woman's lack of sex led to 'hysteria, chlorosis, love melancholy and other unhappy ailments'.²

This concern with sexual pleasure was not always the priority concern for feminists, who focused largely on the question of sexual danger, personal autonomy and protection from male demands.³ Indeed, there was clearly a fear of sexual issues entertained by the leaders of the feminist movement.⁴ Nevertheless, although late 19th century sex education focused more on protection than exploration, some feminists did see it as a way of informing women not simply of the risks, but also the potential joys of sex. In the early 20th century there developed an active interest with questions of sexual pleasure, witnessed above all on the pages of The Freewoman. This was indeed a radical development given that for most of our period a sexual identity for a woman implied that of the prostitute. How was such a shift conceivable? The crucial contributor here was the

¹ The Adult, Oct. 1897, p. 40.

² Bland, Banishing the Beast, p. 172.

³ L. Gordon and E. DuBois, 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth-Century Feminist Thought', Feminist Review, 13, 1983, p. 42.

⁴ In November 1911 the publication of The Freewoman was greeted by many feminists with dismay. Millicent Fawcett was so appalled by the copy she read that 'she tore it up into small pieces'. Bland, Banishing, p. 265. Opposition to the paper was also due to the editorial assault on the politics of woman's suffrage. The Anarchist editors, Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpe had both formerly been WSPU militants, but had left due to their rejection of a feminism that concentrated solely on the vote.

appearance of the new ideas of sexology. There is some controversy surrounding the interpretation of sexology and whether or not it proved to be positive for women.¹ The important point for us however, is that the writings of the sexologists made it easier for women to talk about previously taboo subjects. Sexology was the only current discourse through which women could explore the possibility of being sexual agents as opposed to victims.

One of the problems faced by Anarcho-feminists in understanding sexuality, was the lack of an adequate language. In 1897 The Adult complained that:

there are only two forms of language in connection with sex matters: the scientific, as used by the medical profession, anatomists and lawyers - technical terms and Latin phrases; and...the bald, rugged phrases of the gutter....To raise the discussion of sex matters to a higher plane, a pressing necessity is the formulation of a vocabulary which shall enable ordinary people to discuss in clear cut and clean phrases the sexual thoughts and desires which arise in the mind of every human being.²

Much later Dora Marsden pointed to another problem; even with the inadequate language available to discuss sex, there was disagreement over meanings: 'We are met with misunderstanding and fruitless argument, for a word, as one man uses it, means a thing different from that which it connotes to another. The value of words is not constant. She proposed 'the gradual compiling of a "Select Glossary"'.³ To Nora Kiernan, differences of meaning were contingent upon one's sex: 'We need to discuss....questions that we, as men and women, are as yet at variance'.⁴ This was where the writings of the Sexologists proved useful.

One way in which Anarcho-feminists utilised their writings was in their disavowal of female sexual passivity. For example, 'A Would-be Freewoman', who wanted to leave

¹ Sexology has been represented by many historians as a positive contribution to sexual enlightenment, responsible for the creation of the modern way of looking at sexuality. See for example, J. Weeks, Sex Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1900, (Longmans, London, 1981). Others disagree. Shelia Jeffreys for example, argues that the effect of creating this 'modern' model of sexuality has not necessarily been good for women. S. Jeffreys, The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930, (Pandora, London, 1985).

²⁹² The Adult, V. 1, n. 4, Nov. 1897, p. 58.

³ The Freewoman, 16. May. 1912, p. 503.

⁴ Ibid., 20. June. 1912, p. 66.

her husband, approvingly quoted the idea of Iwan Bloch that women were sexually different from men, but their 'sexual sensibility' was at least as great. But her concern with a woman's right to be sexual did not blind her to sexual danger, especially 'the husband [who] may insist on his "rights", no matter what her feelings of repugnance or distaste may be'.¹ Anarcho-feminists also drew on sexology in their discussion of what constituted legitimate sex. Masturbation, for example, was discussed as a valid practice for single women. Stella Browne wondered how many single women entirely abstained from 'various forms of onanism'. She believed that 'without having recourse to their aid, many women would find abstinence from normal sexual relations impossible'. In other words, she was claiming that most of those women who saw themselves as chaste were in fact engaged in 'practices which constitute sexual indulgence just as truly as do normal sexual relations'.²

There were also issues which divided the paper's contributors. One of the main disagreements was over chastity. Many feminists argued that chastity was an example of women's superior morality. As we have seen, Anarchist women differed in this respect seeing chastity as sexually deficient. The debate on chastity within the pages of The Freewoman was initiated by Upton Sinclair's assertion that it was among celibate women 'that modern psychologists discover the greatest proportion of nervous disorders'.³ In reply, women wrote of the value of sexual self-control. E. M. Watson, unlike many advocates of celibacy, did not assume women to be less sexual than men - merely better at controlling their desires.⁴ Kathryn Oliver declared: 'I am neither a prude nor a puritan, but I am an apostle of self-restraint in sex matters. What is it that raises us above the brute level but the exercise of self-restraint?' Oliver asked: 'How can we possibly be Free Women if, like the majority of men, we become the slaves of our lower appetites?'. She

¹ Ibid., 21. March. 1912, p. 353.

² Ibid., 22. Feb. 1912, p. 270. See also E. M. Watson's article in which she referred to the Sexologist Professor Forel's claim that masturbation was harmless. Ibid., 4. July. 1912, p. 139.

³ Ibid., 18. Jan. 1912, p. 165.

⁴ Ibid., 8. Feb. 1912, p. 231.

wrote that she was unmarried, had always practised abstinence, and, challenging the health aspect, said she enjoyed the best of health.¹

In the next issue, Watson and Oliver were rebuked by 'a New Subscriber', adamant that they should 'not make their temperamental coldness a rigid standard for others'.² Oliver was indignant; wrongly assuming 'a New Subscriber' to be male (she later revealed herself to be Stella Browne), Oliver claimed to speak for most women in declaring:

until they love, the idea of the sexual relationship seldom enters their thoughts. Personally, I never desired the sex relationship until I "fell in love" at about 20....We couldn't marry and from then till now I have had to crush and subdue the sex feeling.³

'A New Subscriber' was scathing. Refusing the claims of moral worth, she replied: 'It will be an unspeakable catastrophe if our feminist movement....falls under the domination of sexually deficient and disappointed women'.⁴ Oliver replied in fury, but 'New Subscriber' finally silenced her with an accusation of cowardice: 'Let those women who....will not try to enjoy their elemental human rights, refrain from attacks on the others who have the courage of their desires as well as their convictions'.⁵ She insisted on a woman's right to be sexual: 'sexual experience is the right of every human being not hopelessly afflicted in mind or body and should be entirely a matter of free choice and personal preference, untainted by bargain or compulsion'.⁶

The struggle over the question of chastity reflected a wider debate. On the one hand, there were those for whom the chaste spinster, seen as superior in health and morals to her married counterpart, was the key to women's liberation. On the other hand, was mobilised the view of the spinster as 'sexually deficient and disappointed'. Stella Browne and others deployed sexological ideas to assert their right to be sexual, but they did so via

¹ *Ibid.*, 15. Feb. 1912, p. 252.

² *Ibid.*, 22. Feb. 1912, p. 270.

³ *Ibid.*, 29. Feb. 1912, p. 290.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7. March. 1912, p. 313.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18. April. 1912, p. 437.

⁶ *The Freewoman*, 21. March. 1912, p. 354.

the condemnation of those women who wished to disavow such a right. Although anti-spinster imagery was prevalent during our period, it is unusual to find that some feminists held similar views.

Anarcho-feminists, Suffrage and the State.

In contrast with the majority of feminists, while they praised the militancy of the suffragettes, Anarcho-feminists regarded their political instincts (hoping for significant change through the vote and parliament) as hopelessly naive.¹ For Anarchists, to link feminism with politics was indeed necessary, but meaningless when left at the level of elections and the state. The nature of the state between 1880 and 1914 was such as to give many women little reason to believe that their best ally in the Socialist struggle was law and the machinery of electoral power. The state Socialists were placing the future of Socialism in a governmental system that women could not enter and that had legitimised and perpetuated their subordinate position in society. Many women were understandably sceptical of the argument that law would lead the way to Socialist equality and morality. Caroline Haddon, a Fabian writing in 1886, knew first-hand not, to ‘confuse this word “right” with “legal”’:

What has a woman, with heart and conscience of her own, to do with “law”, which is only made for rogues, and serves but to inform them how far they may lie and cheat with impunity and where they must draw the line to avoid unpleasant consequences?²

The Fabian careers of Wilson and Dryhurst demonstrate a tendency among women with regard to Socialist tactics and electoral politics. Both women left the Fabian society in 1888, when the Fabian Parliamentary Society was formed. The society officially adopted the policy of using state power as the means to Socialism. This was the signal that Anarcho-feminists should leave. The Fabian picture of Socialist MP’s representing the

¹ The Anarchists had genuine respect for the bravery of the suffragettes. A. A. Davies did not ‘hold with their methods’ but did ‘admire their pluck and perseverance’. A. A. Davies to M. Nettlau, 19. March and 14. April, 1908, NC, IISH.

² C. Haddon, *Where Does Your Interest Come from? A Word to Lady Investors*, (John Heywood, London, 1886), pp. 6-7.

interests of all, no doubt looked suspiciously familiar to such women.¹ It was the same argument for virtual representation that had excluded the working man in 1832 and women at every occasion of franchise reform. The Socialist official, wielding authority on behalf of the workers, was championed by Fabians in terms too similar to James Mill's facile dismissal of women's direct political participation: 'One thing is pretty clear, that all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those of other individuals may be struck off without inconvenience'.² Women had good historical reasons to doubt the legitimacy of representative democracy and to object to the identification of Socialism with that political form. As Dryhurst put it, 'the man who wins' in representative politics 'is he with the loudest voice'.³ Anarcho-feminists suspected that the winning voice would not be theirs.

In arguing that law was an immoral tool of the powerful, Anarchist women were restating one of the principal assumptions of the women's movement. From its origins the feminist movement was principally a campaign against disabling, immoral, and intrusive laws. The anti-state rhetoric found in Anarchist journals was no more venomous than the libertarian language of women's rights literature, as feminists contrasted the private world of feminine morality with the political world of war ruled by masculine states.⁴ This anti-statism was based on a perception of a profound difference in political cultures: the state's culture was radically different in its morality from feminist cultures. Indeed, studies of the women's movement tend to emphasise the way in which feminists derived their ideas and motivation from a common libertarian or reforming outlook, and disliked party politics.⁵

¹ Practical Socialist, Oct. 1886, pp. 164-165.

² J. Mill, 'Essay on Government', (1821), cited in Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem, p. 293.

³ Freedom, V. 6, n. 63, Feb. 1892, p. 7.

⁴ For an example of anti-political sentiment see 'What They Are Doing in the Political World', Women's Penny Paper, 15. Dec. 1888.

⁵ P. Levine, Feminist Lives in Victorian England (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), pp. 38-9. See also B. Harrison, 'State intervention and moral reform', in P. Hollis (ed), Pressure from Without, (Edward Arnold, London, 1974), pp. 289-322.

The Anarcho-feminists built on this perception and tried to convince their sisters that the state was unable to work for feminist causes.

Women Socialists and their non-Socialist counter-parts also took pride in their distance from the halls of state and turned their inability to wield electoral power into an example of, and argument for 'women's moral superiority'.¹ Socialism, too, argued many women, was a pre-eminently moral cause. As state Socialists and Anarchists debated whether or not Socialism was to be a political or an ethical revolution, women often sided with the Anarchist view, in substance if not in name. The defining principle of Socialism, Edith Lees Ellis argued 'is that internal reform in the individual will inevitably lead to external reform in the community, whereas mere external reform, as advocated by the Marxian Socialists, may still leave the individual as egotistic and narrow as before, and as much a danger to the general well being of the community'.² Robert Parker noted in the Men's and Women's Club's final report that the men and women showed distinctly different views on 'the principles which ought to limit state interference in sexual matters'. The men tended to hold 'socialistic' views and supported some measure of state control, while the women were decidedly 'individualistic'.³

At stake in the debate between Anarchist and state Socialist was whether Socialism was to come all at once through revolution or to be gradually implemented through piecemeal reform. Only a total revolution would reach the private world of the family, where women remained trapped from cradle to grave. Legislated Socialism and the permeation of existing institutions threatened to leave women just where the Liberal revolutions had left them, excluded from politics and subordinated at home.⁴ It was not surprising therefore that Rose Witcop criticised the middle-class women's suffrage

¹ J. Hannam, 'Women and Politics', in Purvis (eds), *Women's History Britain, 1850-1945*, p. 228.

² E. Lees Ellis, *The New Horizon in Love and Life*, (Alston Rivers, London, 1910), p. 159.

³ Minutes, 19. June. 1889, Men and Women's Club, PP.

⁴ For a critical reading of the liberal feminist tradition see V. Plumwood, 'Feminism, Privacy and Radical Democracy', in *Anarchist Studies*, V. 3, n. 2, Autumn 1995, pp. 97-120.

movement for giving too much attention to parliament and too little to working women. Many would not qualify for it anyway, so why should women who worked all week in factories or at home care whether or not the middle-class women had the vote? What was needed, she argued, was an agitation for general emancipation; to make women realise that it was not the lack of voting rights that created bad conditions, but the attitudes of a paternalist society which regarded women as a slave in factory and home.¹

Anarchist women urged their Socialist sisters to see that only Anarchism could express Socialism's true meaning for women. When called upon to deliver a speech on the Paris Commune, Wilson identified its legacy with both Anarchism and feminism:

Historians have....left unchronicled the spontaneous action of the people....Take, for instance, the conduct of that part of the people who are generally supposed to be creatures of habit and routine, least fit to act for themselves - the women. When the treachery of the men entrusted with authority allowed the cannon to be surprised.....the woman of Montmartre waited for no centralised organisation, no word of command, but marched up the streets against the muskets of the soldiers...When the fighting was over, they bestowed equal energy upon the reorganisation of social life....They formed committees to inquire into the wants of every family and to organise labour for women....Lastly, when the fighting was raging, the women were seen everywhere.²

The Commune and all of evolutionary history had taught that state authority and submission to law was forever linked to the oppression of women. For women like Wilson, Socialism had to mean Anarchism if it was ever to mean their own liberation. They therefore attempted to direct the politics of Socialism away from state-sponsored reform and towards a moral revolution, believing that 'It is possible to conceive a tolerably intelligent man advocating palliative measures and gradual reform; but a woman who is not a revolutionist is a fool'.³

¹ Voice of Labour, V.1, n. 7, 2. March. 1907, p. 54. See also E. Goldman, The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation, (Freedom Press, London, 1910), p. 10 and Freedom, V. 26, n. 284, Dec. 1912, p. 89.

² Freedom, April. 1888. See also a report of the speech in The Commonweal, 24. March. 1888.

³ Freedom, V. 3, n. 25, Oct. 1888, p. 2.

The women who embraced Anarchism made a clear contribution to the intellectual growth of feminism. They offered a distinctive analysis of the reasons for female oppression, whether it was within the economic sphere or within marriage. The Anarcho-feminists maintained that if an egalitarian society was ever to be built, differences in roles - whether in sexual relationships, childcare, political life or work - had to be based on capacity and preference, not gender. By combining these questions they developed a feminism that was all embracing at a time when the struggle for the vote was becoming the main question for women. Many feminists clearly saw Anarchism as the only ideology that could address their concerns. Agnes Henry explained the appeal: 'In anarchism I see the only base for women to escape marriage without love and obligatory maternity...and the degrading laws and servile customs to which women of all classes have been subjected to for so long'.¹ Of all the fields of libertarian activity, it was perhaps within the feminist movement that the Anarchists had the greatest ideological impact. This should not really surprise us given the 'the links between Anarchist ideology and feminism [which] include a similar analysis of the evils of hierarchical domination, a commitment to individual choice, and a desire to build relationships and institutions upon voluntary co-operation and mutuality rather than upon structural authority'.²

Despite the similarities however, the Anarcho-feminists did not have as great an influence as they might have. Although many women would have agreed with the Anarcho-feminist analysis of female subordination, the ideology of Anarcho-feminism as a whole elicited little attention outside Anarchist circles. It appealed neither to mainstream feminism nor to most women radicals, who turned instead to Socialism. The reason for this rejection

¹ A. Hamon, *Psychologie de l'Anarchiste-Socialiste*, (Stock, Paris, 1895), p. 142.

² B. McKinley, 'Free Love and Domesticity: Lizzie M. Holmes, Hagar Lyndon and the Anarchist Feminist Imagination', *Journal of American Culture*, V. 13, n. 1, Spring, 1990, pp. 55. There is a strong potential for a psychoanalytical interpretation of the sympathy felt by many feminists towards Anarchism and this lies in the female sense of exclusion from the symbolic patriarchal order and the deconstruction of that order which was fundamental to any Anarchist proposition. For a feminist analysis of the semiotic and the symbolic see J. Kristeva, *A Kristeva Reader*, edited by T. Moi, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1986).

was partly due to the negative public view of Anarchism. More important however, was the inappropriateness of an individualistic ethos in an organisational age. The main reason for the lack of influence of Anarcho-feminism lay in the nature of the ideology itself; for the Anarchist goal of complete personal freedom, limited only by the prescription against interfering with the liberty of others, precluded organisation, except in the most rudimentary sense. Although there was widespread agreement on the answers to the 'Woman Question' amongst Anarcho-feminists, there was little co-ordination among them in promoting their ideas, and they worked largely as isolated individuals. Their writings were scattered throughout the Anarchist press. The only journal concentrating on the subjection of women was The Freewoman, which did not appear until 1911, too late to exert any great influence for change on the suffrage-orientated feminist movement. In an organisational age, the insistence on the part of Anarcho-feminists that equality was based on individual refusal to participate in an unjust society seemed anachronistic.

Conclusion.

Surveying the activities and achievements of the Anarchist milieu between 1880 and 1914, it is clear that their worth cannot be assessed according to their numerical support or influence as a distinctive political movement. Although London was the principal political refuge and the centre of the international Anarchist movement, the native followers of Anarchism were always in a minority within the Socialist movement. Anarchist activists never achieved their aim of fermenting an active British following. Most British Socialists saw Anarchism as an understandable response to the brutal class war being fought out in Russia or Spain, but not as something that was applicable to British conditions in which gradual and peaceful change was possible.

It would seem that the Anarchists had precious little to show for all their efforts. Yet to leave any analysis at this level would be misleading. Nobody would dispute the fact that the Anarchists did not spark off a wide movement. Indeed, it is important, to realise that British Anarchism was clearly *not* a 'movement' in the sense of a closely regulated and co-ordinated body. Ideological, ethnic and class differences divided Anarchists into multiform groups and disparate individuals, many of whom had little contact with each other. Although at its most basic level Anarchism focused upon hostility to authority and upon the fostering of individual freedom, through the development of its various currents, it took on a multifaceted and dissonant nature in which the participants only agreed on issues immediately of concern to them. As a result, any attempt to make sense of Anarchism as a movement with a consistent purpose meets with frustration. After all, how does one find parallels between working-class Anarcho-syndicalists attempting to construct revolutionary unions in a modern industrial setting, and the middle-class romantic worship of nature found in various Anarchist communes?

Anarchism then can not be understood as a political movement in the traditional sense. Instead it should be seen as a collection of socio-cultural identities each of which had

its own characteristics. Our analysis of these various Anarchist milieux, the organisational forms they adopted and their means of activity, has demonstrated that Anarchism was in fact more influential than has previously been thought. It was influential as a 'persistent current of spontaneity and activism'.¹ By shifting the focus away from the history of a political 'movement' to the analysis of extra-parliamentary action and grass-roots activity, we have uncovered an Anarchist sensibility that ran through Victorian and Edwardian society and which found expression within a wide range of social and cultural movements. Our analysis of libertarian activism has demonstrated that there was a distinct Anarchist presence within the political culture. This presence varied in strength and influence over the years and was never an important factor. Yet, whether it was as a step towards ideological maturity or as a touchstone against which the coherence of other views could be measured, Anarchism was always present as an undercurrent of activism.

If the Anarchists did not win a mass following, they made a distinct contribution in the sphere of tactics. Above all this was the case when they were active in the trade unions and the Syndicalist movement. In association with trade unionism, Anarchism was to show itself an effective and formidable force in practical politics. A substantial number of Anarchists clearly manifested concentrated action in the world of labour in the period after the London dock strike. Individual Anarchists played a major role in trade unions as both leaders and members of the rank and file. In the years after 1889 these activists could be found voicing ideas on union democracy, federation, amalgamation, workers' control and the general strike. This phase of union activity - roughly between 1889 and 1898 - was followed by a quiet period. Yet between 1906 and 1914 a new generation of Anarchists plunged even more resolutely into labour struggles during the period of the Syndicalist revolt. Despite their sometimes ambivalent attitude, the Anarchists provided a steady stream of propaganda, information and discussion upon the developments of French

¹ Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, p. 87.

Syndicalism and, to a lesser degree, American Syndicalism. Their long and involved debate on Syndicalism ensured that a considerable group of people were conscious of the progress of Syndicalist ideas.

The role of Anarchists within the organised labour movement demonstrates that it was only when they compromised their absolute purism that Anarchists had any serious impact on the political and social life of Britain. Trade unionism and Syndicalism were precisely areas in which a retreat from purism was necessary in order to effect change. The Anarchists trade unionists experience of working-class organisation in a democratic state made them move a long way towards coming to terms with existing society and obliged them to temper their revolutionary ideals with a considerable amount of practical reformist action. In a sense therefore the Anarchist trade unionists were the biggest indictment of Anarchism as an ideology. They accepted that Anarchism, in its purest sense, was incapable of achieving any decisive breakthrough in terms of building a mass movement as the precursor to revolutionary change.

To a lesser extent than their comrades who were active in the labour movement, those Anarchists who concentrated their activity on feminism and educational reform also made a distinctive input to the debates then taking place on these questions. The woman who embraced Anarchism made a clear contribution to the growth of the British feminist movement. They offered a clear analysis of the reasons for female oppression, whether it was within the economic sphere, the family or marriage. They also took a leading role in developing ideas on female sexuality. The Anarchist feminists maintained that if an egalitarian society was ever to be built, differences in roles - whether in sexual relationships, childcare, political life or work - had to be based on capacity and preference, not gender. By combining all these questions they developed a feminism that was all embracing at a time when the struggle for the vote was becoming the main question for women.

Anarchist forays into the field of education were also highly original. Their analysis of the national education system for children and the alternatives they proposed were very different from the mainstream of educational thought and practice. For the Anarchists the state system of education was authoritarian in that it fostered deferential behaviour in its pupils and was based on coercion rather than freedom. The actual process of teaching in state schools was also attacked from the viewpoint of the child, the user and the learner. While the Anarchist critique might have been started with perspectives on the intentions of the state in creating a national system, on the controlling urges of teachers and on the pernicious nature of coercion, it was underpinned by a fundamental respect for the young as individuals, accorded powers of initiative, a capacity for discretion, a right to reject, an ability to think for themselves. They were amongst the first educational initiatives in Britain which sought to place the child, and nobody else, at the forefront of the theory and practice of education. The experiments in libertarian education clearly had strong roots in basic human rights. The schools apportioned to learners a degree of independence and autonomy that Anarchists sought for everybody. The schools held a set of beliefs that sought to break down the boundaries between pupils and teachers, that was grounded in a desire to construct non-coercive and anti-authoritarian pedagogies, and that was not concerned with a system of reward and punishment. It was an all-embracing philosophy of education that was compatible with Anarchist views of freedom.

Yet neither the Anarchist feminists nor the Anarchist educators had very much success in influencing the women's movement generally or the wider movement for educational reform. The Anarchist feminists for example, were destined to remain a small clique of individuals, working largely in isolation, with very few adherents. They took part in the campaign to undermine the prejudices underlying male - female relations and anticipated many of the campaigns that would absorb the energies of the left in the 1960's, but never became a central strand in the contemporary women's movement. In contrast to

those Anarchists who were active in the labour movement, the individuals who expressed their activity within these two fields refused to compromise their ideological purism and reach beyond their own sub-culture in order to affect change. Their failure to do this demonstrates the sectarian tendency to self-isolation that was a central feature of Anarchist politics. Despite the seriousness with which issues of educational reform and women's equality were thought through and acted upon, and despite the existence of a potential audience for such thinking, there is little evidence to suggest that the Anarchists had any serious influence outside of their own milieu. As we saw in chapter two, there were profound currents of anti-statism within working-class culture. The Anarchists, however, failed to capitalise on such feelings. This was especially evident from our analysis of Anarchist forays into the field of education. Such a failure was largely due to the fact that British Anarchism demonstrated such a strong disregard for organisational efficiency and had a tendency to generate its own sub-culture. The result was that those Anarchists who involved themselves in feminist campaigns or educational issues were forced to plough a lonely furrow, often of their own making.

If the analysis of libertarian education and Anarcho-feminism suggests that Anarchism was prone to sectarianism, the account of the Anarchist communes and co-operatives would only seem to confirm this. While the utopian co-operators in non-revolutionary times may have seen their role as exemplary to encourage some general development, the spirit of the enterprise could not but be affected by the loneliness of it all. The desperate need to live in good fellowship was unsupported by the general social situation or a specific social movement. Inevitably, therefore, no matter how much the intention was to provide examples for others, the world at large appeared hostile and the enterprise tended to represent not so much an attack on the old world but a withdrawal from it. This separation was in turn reinforced by the strict admission policies adopted by many of the communities, policies which justify the accusation of sectarianism.

Despite its contributions to the realm of ideas and tactics, it is clear that the diffuse nature of Anarchist activism, its failure to strike an organisational balance between solidarity and individual freedom and its tendency to establish self-contained and sectarian cultural milieus, meant that its influence was not as extensive as it could have been. It was destined to be divided and inconsistent and could never be anything but a sub-culture. Nevertheless, in their demand for the total reconstruction of the human condition the Anarchists promoted a goal worth fighting for to those, from whatever class, who embraced its ideas; a society where wealth would no longer be owned and controlled by a self-interested minority, but would become the common possession of all the world's inhabitants (excluding the individualist Anarchists, of course). The slavery of wage labour, and its relentless toll on the physical and mental well-being of those forced to depend on it, would be replaced by the voluntary co-operation of free and equal individuals engaged in enjoyable productive activity, in which the boundaries between work and play would disappear. The subordination of human needs to the dictates of production for profit via the market, and the domination of every area of human activity by money and exchange relationships, would give way to production for the satisfaction of every individual's freely chosen needs and desires, and unrestricted access for all to the use and enjoyment of abundant quantities of wealth. Family relationships would be revolutionised, so would the education of young and old. Class divided society and the system of competitive national states, with their necessary attendant apparatus of armies, police, courts and prisons would give way to a free harmonious, classless world community of liberated humans.

Although they never saw this new utopia, the British Anarchists recognised that the paths leading towards it were myriad. They therefore supported all movements which seemed to be heading in a libertarian direction. They sought to dismantle power pyramids and develop networks of co-operation. They tried to build alternative institutions and counter-cultures: free schools, which encouraged learning by desire and response to

individual needs; factories based on the principles of self-management and workers' control; communes which pooled resources and shared skills; and revolutionised personal and sexual relations. If the Anarchists did not realise their long term aims, they went some way to creating alternative cultures and transforming the everyday life of many individuals. Anarchists, as we have seen, had a whole range of strategies to expand human freedom in the here and now, not only in a mythical future. As a result, they were able to engage productively with some of the problems of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

Far from being the naive, infantile or utopian fantasy imagined by some observers, British Anarchism, as the present study has demonstrated, was profound, complex and subtle. It asked questions and had answers to many of the burning issues of the day, whether it was the status of women in society or how children should be taught. As such, it deserves more serious consideration than has hitherto been the case. Those who emphasise 'the monumental ineffectiveness of anarchism', have ignored the way in which the Anarchist ethos questioned and influenced many of the fundamental ideas and values by which Victorian and Edwardian people lived their lives.¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

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